

# Chapter 1: Defining Your Peer Educator Position

## Importance/Relevance

- Peer educators offer a type of clout and credibility with their peers that is unique. For this reason, peer education can be an effective tool for supporting student learning and academic success, psychosocial development, sense of belonging, and connectedness within the university community.
- Thinking about your goals and how the peer educator role will address them is critical. Effective peer education structures are designed and developed to meet specific objectives derived from the learning and experience outcomes you have articulated for students participating in your course, program, or initiative.
- The role and desired outcomes for the peer education component of your course or program will determine how you address other important issues. The development and assessment of the peer education model you enact is interwoven with the ongoing design, content, and evaluation of your course/program.
- Peer educators are paraprofessionals whose success is dependent upon clearly articulated selection processes, job descriptions and expectations, training and supervision, and evaluation.
- UC recognizes peer education as a specific type of experiential learning which obliges faculty and staff to tend to the learning needs of the peer educators as well as the learning needs of the students the peer educator is serving.

## Questions to Answer/Things to Consider

- What are the learning outcomes for students participating the program, course, or initiative into which you want to incorporate peer education?
- What role and impact you want the peer educators to have as they mentor and/or facilitate learning for their peers? Are these goals that peer educators can achieve?
- Are there other peer educators on campus working with faculty and staff in courses or programs that are similar to what you want to do? Would you like to model your program after theirs? Could you partner together to accomplish your goals?
- What are the best practices for this type of program, course, or initiative? For this peer educator role?
- How will you compensate peer educators for their service? Will this be a paid or volunteer position? Will peer educators enroll in a course to receive the Peer Educator attribute and/or course credit?
- What skills, abilities, characteristics, and expertise will you want peer educators to possess in order to bring about the outcomes you want the role to achieve? Are these pre-requisite qualifications or can you train the peer educators to acquire this knowledge and skill?
- How many hours per week, term, etc. will peer educators be required to work? How and when will they receive training, supervision, and feedback?
- How will you measure the effectiveness of the peer educator role or program that you enact?

## Informational Content

### What can Peer Educators do?

Peer educators may be engaged in a wide range of activities. Commonly, peer educators may:

- Work with students individually, or in groups
- Facilitate instruction, in or out of the classroom, around defined learning outcomes or content

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- Mentor students about how to make the most of their college experience generally, or in relation to a particular opportunity
- Work closely with faculty while assisting in specific courses, tutoring, and/or connecting their mentees with learning resources, academic program expectations, and the like
- Engage in high profile positions, sometimes with public speaking responsibilities, or in lower profile settings behind the scenes
- Help supervise other peer educators or oversee processes that contribute toward overall management of your program, course, or initiative
- Carry out operations logistics and detail so long as they are also engaged in instructing or mentoring others
- Help resolve conflicts and/or connect students with university resources

To carry out these responsibilities, peer educators may work anywhere from a few to as many as 24 hours a week when enrolled in classes (e.g., during fall and spring semesters) and up to 40 hours per week during breaks including summer. Your goals for your program and the defined outcomes of the peer educator role will determine the intensity and duration of the job. For example, Peer Tutors in the Learning Assistance Center are expected to dedicate at least 7 hours per week throughout the year, whereas New Student Orientation Leaders dedicate 40 hours per week from May to August only.

## What Qualifications are Needed?

Peer educators are generally more experienced or accomplished than the students that they are instructing or mentoring. Peer educators are often motivated by a desire to “pay-it-forward,” by paving the way for students coming up behind them to succeed in areas where they themselves either struggled or benefitted from specialized programs. And less experienced students respect the expertise of those who are just ahead of them, watching what they have managed to do, depending upon their shared insights for guidance. To build upon this peer-to-peer dynamic, common qualifications include:

- A minimum number of terms or years of enrollment at UC before assuming the role, most often one year of enrollment at UC
- Minimum grade point averages, usually a “B” average but minimum requirements may vary significantly depending upon the specific tasks to be performed and goals of your program. For example, peer educators involved in facilitating instruction are expected to hold higher grades overall as well as in the content areas where they teach or tutor. All peer educators should be in good academic standing in accordance with their academic program requirements.
- Good communication and interpersonal skills, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion, in order to create positive learning environments
- Specialized experience or expertise related to the focus of the position/program. For example, lifeguarding credentials are required to be an aquatics lead.

As you set your qualifications, focus on the minimum qualifications necessary knowing that you will offer peer educators opportunities for training, practice, and reflection. Keep in mind that many of the skills and abilities you may desire in a peer educator can be taught to them through your training programs.

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## Developing Learning Outcomes for Peer Educators

Learning outcomes for peer educators can help guide the development of your peer education program, including the training and assessment. Before creating learning outcomes, it's important to know what your peer educators will be doing. Learning outcomes will focus on what peer educators need to learn to perform effectively as well as to grow and mature in their role. When it comes to developing learning outcomes, the [National Peer Educator Survey](#) is a good resource. They utilize several learning outcomes based on *Learning Reconsidered*. Examples include:

- Cognitive complexity
- Interpersonal competence
- Humanitarianism and civic engagement

Depending on the specific needs of your program, you might add more learning outcomes. Include topics that are specific to your program's stated goals. For example, if you are creating a peer health education program, you might include a learning outcome focused on health knowledge and literacy.

## **Current Implementation Examples**

There are several established peer education programs at the University of Cincinnati that illustrate how you might design your peer education position:

- Peer educators in the Student Wellness Center do programming on health and wellness topics.
  - They are paid positions.
  - Students become Certified Peer Educators through the BACCHUS Initiatives of NASPA as part of the program.
  - They are evaluated using the National Peer Education Survey.
- Peer educators in First Year Experience and Learning Communities Peer Leaders are responsible for providing academic support and leading Learning Community meetings twice each week with content focused on the FYE target learning areas, planning and implementing social events for LC members, and providing individual and small group mentoring. Peer Leaders attend weekly meetings, have weekly office hours and develop lesson plans to meet the needs of their students. Peer leaders must have experience and the academic background needed to address the academic needs and interests of their students. An important role of Peer Leaders is collaborating with faculty, advisors, organizations, and others to give students a high quality LC experience that prepares them for subsequent academic accomplishments.
  - They are paid positions
  - All who complete training receive the highest level of certification through the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA)

## **Supplemental Documents/Common Forms**

- Job description and program links available from [www.uc.edu/pen](http://www.uc.edu/pen) under the tab, Become a Peer Educator