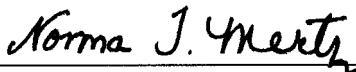


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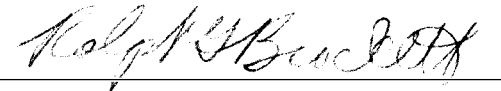
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Suzanne L. Hamid entitled "The Experiences of Peer Leaders in First-Year Seminars." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Administration and Policy Studies.

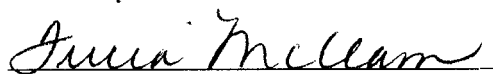


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THE EXPERIENCES OF PEER LEADERS IN FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Education

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Suzanne L. Hamid

December, 2004

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Abstract

Despite extensive evidence supporting the positive effect of peer leaders on the students with whom they work, and anecdotal reports that the experience is rewarding for the peer leaders, we have known almost nothing about the impact of the experience on the peer leaders themselves. The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars.

The study consisted of peer leaders at three universities, in different geographic regions of the United States. Data were collected from questionnaire responses from 83 peer leaders and interviews with 16 peer leaders and 5 program directors from these institutions for which pseudonyms were assigned—Blue University, Yellow University, and Pink University. While the questionnaire responses served as the dominant source of data, together with institutional documents at each site about the peer leadership program, and researcher field notes gathered during two-day visits to each site, they formed the basis of the findings.

Five themes emerged from the data. The experiences of peer leaders across sites were characterized by: (1) Positive Interactions; (2) How they helped their First-Year

students; (3) A Desire to be liked; (4) Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles, and (5) the Impact on (their) Peer Leader Development.

The findings were then used to consider the relation between the peer leaders' experiences and social interdependence theory. The conclusions that can reasonably be drawn from the study are:

1. Peer leaders derived personal, social and career building benefits from serving as peer leaders.
2. Serving as a peer leader appears to be an overwhelmingly positive experience for those who choose to do so.
3. Social interdependence theory would appear to be a useful model for predicting the kind of experiences that peer leaders have with their students.

The study informs college and university administrators and policymakers with information that can help them in making decisions about initiating and/or maintaining peer leadership programs, and in recruiting peer leaders from the perspective of peer leaders.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

With roots in the tradition of one-room schoolhouses, peers have enhanced the learning of both younger and older students (Whitman, 1988). This tradition has been revived and revitalized in the growing use of students in helping roles in a variety of higher education settings (Ender & Kay, 2001). In their roles as peer educators, student assistants, student mentors, student aides, resident assistants and co-teachers, "paraprofessionals" perform a myriad of services for their fellow students including "assisting, coaching, problem solving, encouraging, modeling, and supporting" (p. 1), and have been found to have a significant positive impact on the growth and development of the students they serve (Brown & Zunker, 1966; Carkhuff, 1968; Carkhuff & Truax, 1965; Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993; Cuseo, 1991; Delworth, Sherwood & Casaburri, 1974; Ender 1984; Hart 1995; Powell, 1959; Zunker, 1975; Rabiecki & Brabeck 1985; Ragle & Krone 1989; Winston & Ender, 1988; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996).

According to John Gardner (1996), a leading scholar in the freshman year experience movement, one area of students helping students that has proven to be particularly important and has attracted widespread attention is the use of peer leaders as co-teachers of freshman seminar classes. In the 1980's, as institutions of higher education became increasingly concerned about issues pointedly identified by Tinto (1975, 1987), such as, why do students leave and what factors contribute to student success, colleges and universities began to implement a variety of strategies to enhance freshman success and retention. The strategies were built on student development research and literature that suggested that students were more likely to be successful and to persist in school by "becoming involved" (Astin, 1985; Astin 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Upcraft & Gardner 1989). To this end, many institutions sought to create and boost fledgling first-year seminars in an attempt to improve student involvement and increase student retention (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). According to the 2000 National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programming (Linder, 2002), of the responding institutions ($n = 1,013$), the majority of

institutions had one or more of the following "research-based goals" for their freshman seminar:

- Enhancing academic skills
- Helping students transition to college and provide an orientation to campus resources
- Helping students improve their self concept. (p.7)

The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, founded by Gardner in 1986, reports that 73% of America's universities and colleges now offer a first-year seminar (Linder, 2002). Moreover, the number of institutions reporting that upper-level peers serve as co-teachers of first-year seminars at their respective institutions is increasing. In 1994, 8.2% of colleges and universities surveyed were using peer leaders in first-year seminars (National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition). A recent survey by the Policy Center on the First-year of College (2000), found that 25% were doing so.

Hamid and VanHook (2001) surveyed 40 institutions about their reasons for having peer leader programs and found the most frequently cited reasons as the following:

1. Peer leaders establish good connections with first-year students.

2. Peer leaders are role models for success.
3. Peer leaders serve as mentors.
4. Peer leaders can be an academic resource for students.
5. Peer leaders can be an extension of orientation.
6. A peer leader can bridge the gap between students and teachers.
7. This type of program provides leadership opportunities for outstanding students.

Peer leaders have been shown to have a significant impact on first-year seminars and first-year students (Astin, 1993; Cuseo, 1991; Gardner, 1996; Hamid, 2001; Terenzini et. al, 1996). They have proven to be critical to the success of first-year students by helping them to make the transition from high school to college easier (Astin, 1993; Terenzini et. al, 1996). Peer leaders have also been reported to have a positive impact on the retention of first-year students as reflected in increases in freshmen to sophomore retention rates (Hamid, 2001). Further, it is widely argued that peers are more capable than faculty of engendering the involvement of first-year students and that they are less intimidating, and, therefore, make it easier and more comfortable for first-year students to participate in the seminar (Cuseo, 1991).

Little is known about the effects of peer leader programs on peer leaders. While not a focus of the study, a number of institutions that participated in Hamid and Van Hook's (1999) study of 40 institutions with peer leader programs returned their surveys with reports from peer leaders about their experiences. These reports strongly, albeit anecdotally, suggested that they perceived their experiences as peer leaders to have contributed to their own growth and development. Among the outcomes they cited were:

- Personal satisfaction that comes from helping others;
- Development of transferable and marketable skills such as communication, problem-solving, creativity, analytical and critical thinking skills;
- Opportunities to learn more about themselves;
- Opportunities for personal growth;
- Increased understanding of their own learning processes. (Hamid & VanHook, p.86)

Despite extensive evidence supporting the positive effect of peer leaders on the students with whom they work, and anecdotal reports that the experience is rewarding for peer leaders (Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993; Cuseo, 1991; Gardner, 1996; Hamid & Van Hook, 1999; Hart, 1995;

Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996) we know almost nothing about the impact of the experience on the peer leaders themselves. Commenting on the state of research on peer leader programs, Gardner and Hamid (2001) have poignantly argued that:

there is a tremendous shortage of assessment on the effectiveness of peer leader programs, especially of assessment that moves beyond levels of student satisfaction. We need to know more about the impact of such programs for both the peer leaders and the students. (pp. 99-100)

Given the increasing use of peer leaders and the extensive resources their use involves, particularly in peer leader time and effort, it is both timely and relevant to investigate the effects of the peer leader experience on the peer leaders.

Statement of the Problem

As vital as peer leaders are to the process of student success in first-year seminars, we know little about the effects of the experience on peer leaders themselves. Anecdotal reports suggest the experience does indeed influence them, but the nature and direction of that influence remains unclear and empirically unestablished.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars.

Research Questions

The research questions which guided the study were:

1. How do peer leaders describe their peer leadership experiences?
2. Does social interdependence theory explain the kind of peer leader experiences that emerge?
 - a. Is the type of interdependence that exists among the group competitive or cooperative?
 - b. In what ways did the type of interaction that exists affect the outcome of the experiences?

Significance of the Study

Given that we know little about the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars, this study will provide information about the nature of the experience, information we currently do not have. In doing so, the study will begin to build a base of empirical knowledge about the topic.

The information gleaned from this study should also provide college and university administrators and policymakers with information that can help them in making

decisions about initiating and/or maintaining peer leadership programs, and in recruiting peer leaders from the perspective of peer leaders.

Preview of Method and Procedures

Using a qualitative approach to research, the study used a qualitative multi-site (three) case study to examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars at three universities, in different geographic regions of the United States. The institutions used for this study and the basis for their selection is detailed in Chapter 3 under Site and Population (see page 46). Data were collected from (1) a questionnaire, with open-ended questions, which was distributed to the peer leaders at the three sites, (2) on-site interviews with selected peer leaders and the program director at each site, (3) institutional documents about the peer leadership program at each site, and (4) researcher field notes about each site. The data were analyzed within and across case analyses to arrive at the themes and categories that emerged from responses to the questions.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to peer leaders at three institutions that had exemplary peer leadership programs.

While the institutions are geographically diverse, the findings are limited to the peer leaders at those three institutions and may not speak to the experiences of peer leaders at other institutions.

Limitations of the Study

In using a qualitative case study design, the intent was to gain a depth of understanding about the phenomenon of peer leader experiences in exemplary programs. Thus some measure of breadth was sacrificed. Multiple sites and multiple cases enhanced the generalizability of the results to other exemplary programs (Merriam, 2001). While the findings may be suggestive of what occurs in peer leader programs in general, the findings are limited to the three institutions studied.

Conceptual Framework

Social interdependence theory provided the conceptual framework for the study. Social interdependence theory, built on the work of Koffka (1935), Lewin (1948, 1951) and Deutsch (1949), holds that groups are dynamic wholes and that the essence of a group is the interdependence that exists among its members (created by common goals). Further, this theory hypothesizes that the way interdependence among goals is structured will determine

how group members interact with each other and thus, to a great extent, the outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Two types of interdependence are posited: (1) positive interdependence, which leads to promotive interaction where individuals facilitate each other's efforts to succeed; and (2) negative interdependence, which leads to oppositional interaction, where individuals focus on increasing their own success and hinder others in the group in their efforts to achieve. (See Figures 1a and 1b for outcomes of positive and negative interaction).

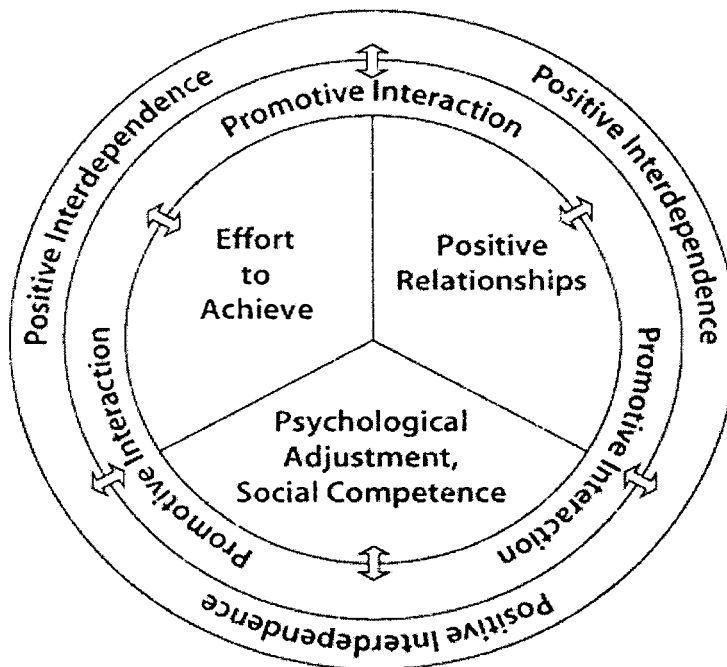


Figure 1a. Outcomes of Positive Interaction.

From *Outcomes of Cooperation in Circles of Learning*, by Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. & Holubee, E. 1993. 4th ed. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

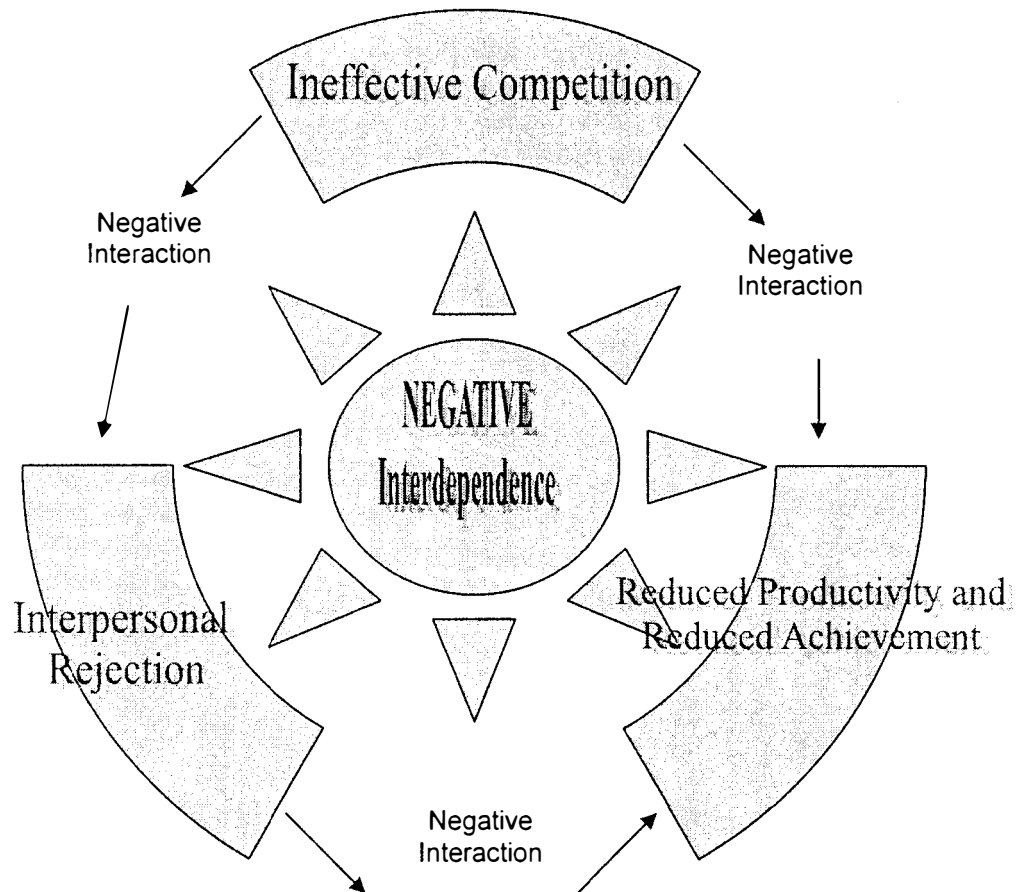


Figure 1b. Outcomes of Negative Interaction.

Derived from Outcomes of Cooperation in *Circles of Learning*, by Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. & Holubee, E. 1993. 4th ed. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Consequently, each of these types of interaction affects the outcomes differently (Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

Relating the theory to the peer leadership experience, since positive interdependence leads to promotive interaction (e.g. the giving and receiving of help and assistance, the exchanging of resources and information, giving and receiving feedback, challenging each other's reasoning, encouraging each other to achieve), then if the experiences of the peer leaders are characterized by positive interdependence or match the notion of positive interdependence, one would expect these peer leaders to be positive about their experience as a peer leader. Moreover, one would expect that these peer leaders would feel good about themselves, feel a part of the group, and would feel that they had achieved the goals or tasks of the group.

If, on the other hand, the experiences of the peer leaders are characterized by oppositional interaction (as involving bad relations within the group, with individuals opposing and hindering each other's efforts), then one would expect that their experiences would be perceived as negative ones.

Conceptually, then, one would expect to be able to describe the impact of the experience on peer leaders by

the way they characterize the type of interaction that occurred in the group. If the theory holds, the more positive the interdependence, the more positive peer leaders will describe their experiences. Thus, social interdependence theory will not only serve as the conceptual framework for the study, influencing the framing of the questionnaire to be used, but also as a means or lens for analyzing the data.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into 8 chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the study and includes the following sections: the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, summary of the method and procedures used, and this organizational plan of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the research and literature related to the study and an explication of the theoretical framework of the study.

In Chapter 3 the method and procedure used in the conduct of the study are detailed.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 detail the findings of the study by site and provide case study narratives of each of the

institutions studied: Blue University, Yellow University and Pink University.

Chapter 7 details the findings of the study in terms of the multiple cases used and social interdependence theory, the conceptual framework guiding the study.

Chapter 8 includes a review of the study and its findings, a discussion of those findings, conclusions, implications of the study for university educators and policy makers, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars. The relevant research and literature on this topic is reviewed in this chapter. First, the literature regarding the evolution of the Freshman Year Experience movement and freshman seminars is reviewed, then peer leadership and its use and impact on the freshman year experience are discussed, and finally, social interdependence theory, the theoretical framework for the study, is examined in detail.

The Freshman Year Experience

The history of American higher education has witnessed countless reform initiatives, but history has demonstrated that not all reform initiatives survive. El-Khawas (2002) posed three "indicators" of the success of a reform:

- The survival of a reform,
- Whether the reform has impacted other institutions and has been "adopted" (p. 1) by many institutions, and
- The expansion of a professional network to sponsor and support greater awareness and understanding of the reform.

One reform movement that measures up to all three of El-Khawas' (2002) "indicators" and has affected and changed the practices of many colleges and universities over the past three decades is the freshman year experience movement or the first-year experience movement. (Over the last ten years, the term "first-year experience" has been formally adopted by the National Resource Center for the First-year Experience—home of the Freshman Year Experience Movement, so as to appeal to the international constituents who relate to the term first-year versus freshman). On the occasion of the 20th annual Conference on The First-Year Experience in 2001, John N. Gardner, founder of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, acknowledged:

We have established a national reform movement and numerous adherents representing hundreds and hundreds of campuses... We have witnessed in the second half of the 20th century a remarkable bipartisan basis of support for greater access to higher education, and support for new students. (p. 10)

What is the freshman year experience and what has triggered this reform?

FYE: History and Evolution

The term Freshman Year Experience (FYE) was "coined and promoted by the University of South Carolina's first National Conference on the Freshman Year Experience in 1983" (Gardner, 1986 p. 262). Between 1984 and 1994, there were over 20 national reports and proposals that called for the reform of undergraduate education (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Due to variations in philosophies, purposes and general education requirements in the undergraduate curriculum, these reports concluded that undergraduate education was in a state of chaos (Gaff & Ratcliff, 1997; Johnson, 2002; Ratcliff & Associates, 1995; Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Several of these reports suggested that undergraduate education was "fragmented" and recommended that institutions address the lack of common learning experiences in undergraduate education (Johnson, 2002). Boyer (1987), in *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, contended, "The disciplines have fragmented themselves into smaller and smaller pieces, and undergraduates find it difficult to see patterns in their courses and to relate what they learn to life" (p.3).

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) contended that the recommendations from these national educational reports (Association of American Colleges, 1985 and Boyer, 1987) ignited a counterpart movement in American education to deal with the first year of college. Much of the reform literature recommended some form of support for undergraduate education, particularly in the first year of college (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Boyer, 1987; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

In the wake of these calls for reform, institutions shifted from a sole focus on questions of why students left college (dropped out) to factors that would contribute to student success and thereby enhance their likelihood of persisting in college. In part, this shift reflected a growing body of research and literature suggesting that the kind of first year experiences college students had largely determined their academic success and the likelihood of their graduating (Astin, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Responding to Gardner's claim that "greater attention must be placed on the freshman and sophomore years" (1986, p. 261), and recognizing the inadequacy of orientation programs, the influx of underprepared students to campuses and changes in college

curricula (Dwyer, 1989), the Freshman Year Experience (FYE) movement flourished as colleges and universities implemented a variety of strategies to enhance freshman success. These strategies were designed to improve programs and services, both in and out of the classroom, with the goal of retaining students after their first year at college. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) identified a number of such strategies perceived to enhance freshman success:

- Comprehensive orientation activities for students and families
- Developmental advising
- Academic assistance programs (early assessment, tutoring, learning skills, development, supplemental instruction)
- Mentoring and career counseling
- Residence hall programs, campus activities, and wellness programs
- Freshmen seminars

By the end of the 1980s, Upcraft and Gardner (1989) acknowledged that a "grassroots movement" on the freshman year experience had emerged (p. xiv). Moreover, Gardner (1986), the leading authority on the freshman year experience movement, pronounced:

A movement is taking place in American higher education to change the way colleges and universities treat, welcome, assimilate, support, and most importantly, inform their freshman students in this new dawning age of information. That movement is something which has come to be known as the "freshman year experience" phenomenon... (p. 261).

By 1995, the American Council on Education reported that 82% of colleges and universities had "taken steps to improve the freshman year," in contrast to only 37% in 1987 (Gardner, 2001). Similarly, in her 1996 discussion on the influence of the Freshman Year Experience movement on American higher education, El-Khawas (1996) acknowledged that, "...by the mid-1990s, three-quarters of the nation's colleges and universities reported greater attention to the freshman experience" (p. 2).

Today, the Freshman Year Experience movement in the U.S.A. is nearly three decades old and well integrated into American higher education (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Cuseo, 1991; Sax, Astin, Korn, William & Mahoney, 2001; Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2004). While this movement has sought to stitch success into all aspects of university life and has promoted many interventions to enhance student success,

freshman seminars by themselves have successfully addressed many of the needs of freshman students and "tackled a long standing, seemingly endemic problem for higher education, the confusion and difficulties that cause many new students to drop out of college during or at the end of their freshman year" (El-Khawas, 2002).

Freshman Seminars

The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has reported that 74% of America's universities now offer a freshman seminar (Skipper, 2002). While there are "many variations" of first-year seminars" (Linder 2002, p.1), the freshman seminar is a course designed to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year college students into the institution (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Gordon, 1989). In the National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programming which was conducted in 2000 (Linder, 2001), of the responding institutions ($n = 1,013$), 73.9% reported that they offered some type of freshman seminar. The average age of the freshman seminar by reporting institutions was 8.9 years with the oldest seminar reported as 72 years. The majority of institutions had one or more of the following "research-based goals" for their freshman seminar:

- Enhancing academic skills
- Helping students transition to college and provide an orientation to campus resources
- Helping students improve their self concept. (7)

Five variations of freshman seminars were identified: *extended orientation seminars* ($n = 465$), *academic seminars with common content* ($n = 125$), *academic seminars with variable content across sections* ($n = 96$), *basic study skills seminars* ($n = 27$) and *professional seminars* ($n = 20$). *Extended orientations seminars*, were the most frequent type of freshman seminars reported and are more commonly referred to as "freshman orientation, college survival, or student success courses" (Linder, p. 1). The most frequently mentioned topics addressed in such seminars were: academic skills, time management, personal development and self awareness, transition to college, and career exploration.

According to the survey, 81.7% of all freshman seminars were graded with a letter grade, nearly 50% ran for one semester or quarter, and 88.7% of seminars carried academic credit toward graduation (2000 National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programming). Further, such seminars were usually kept to a maximum of 25 students to encourage

greater interaction between faculty and students (Gahagan, 2002), and were taught by a variety of people. The survey revealed that 89.1% of seminars were taught by faculty, 53.9% by student affairs professionals, 37% by campus administrators, 18.9% by upper level undergraduate students, and 9.6% by graduate students. Further, 32% of the seminars were reported to be co-taught, either by two faculty, a faculty and a student affairs administrator, or either of the aforementioned paired with an undergraduate or graduate student (2000 National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programming).

Freshman success was defined by Upcraft and Gardner (1989) as making progress toward fulfilling educational and personal goals by: 1) developing academic and intellectual competence; 2) establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships; 3) developing an identity; 4) deciding on a career and life-style; 5) maintaining personal health and Wellness; and 6) developing an integrated philosophy of life. Today's freshman seminars seek to help students do just that (Linder, 2002; Skipper, 2002).

Historical Overview

Although the University of South Carolina's University 101 freshman seminar, established in 1972, has served as a

model and catalyst for freshman seminars worldwide (El-Khawas, 2002; Watts, 1999), there is evidence that freshman seminars have been part of the American higher education curriculum for well over a century (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992; Gahagan, 2002; Gordon, 1989). While Gordon (1989) maintained that the first freshman seminar originated at Boston University in 1888, the 1994 National Survey of Freshman Seminar Programs (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996) has identified an earlier freshman seminar that reportedly began in 1882 at Lee College in Kentucky. Both of these seminars focused on providing students with an extended orientation to campus and to higher education.

Gordon (1989) described two types of freshman seminars that were implemented by institutions during the first half of the 20th century: a course designed as an extension of orientation and an introduction to higher education exemplified by Boston University in 1888 and Reed College in 1911; and academic seminars where students worked on a specific academic subjects of common interest to the group as at the University of Michigan in 1900, and Dartmouth College in 1924.

By the 1930s, approximately 30% of colleges and universities were offering freshman seminars (Gordon,

1989). However, the popularity of freshman seminars declined over the next 30 years, and the numbers of institutions with freshman seminars dwindled (Caple, 1964). Reasons for this decline ranged from faculty resistance to supporting a credit bearing course that dealt with "life adjustment" (Caple, 1964), to concerns like the one expressed by Levine and Weingart (1974), who argued that freshman seminars were "one of a number of piecemeal reforms in American higher education. . . just another small class for freshmen" (p. 9). Nevertheless, the benefits of the freshman seminar did not go unrecognized. At the 1959-60 trial of Harvard University's Freshman Seminar Program, the program's most vocal critics concluded:

The Program has revealed to a good many Professors that students are human beings and worth talking to. The Seminars have rekindled for many a delight in teaching for its own sake. The Program has provided to students an amicable and encouraging atmosphere, in which the personal concern of an instructor has replaced the threat of grades as an incentive to performance. Such achievements warrant continuing

support for the Freshman Seminars.

(<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~seminars/fs/history.html>)

After almost vanishing by the 1960s (Barefoot & Fidler 1996), the Freshman Year Experience Movement, with its base in the research on student success, revived and invigorated the freshman seminar, and it has experienced continuous growth since the mid-1970s. The freshman seminar is now established as an effective medium to address the issues of contemporary college life and to help freshman students succeed (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Gordon, 1989; Watts, 1999). Gordon (1989) has also emphasized that freshman seminars use pedagogical methods that facilitate active learning, high levels of interaction, and critical thinking. One of the ways by which these pedagogical methods are realized is through the peer support group, such as, student groups and networks that promote student-to-student interaction and the use of peer leaders to help facilitate first-year seminar courses (Gardner, 1996; Gardner & Hamid; 2001; Gardner & Hunter, 1999; Hamid & Vanhook, 2001). Such students are seen as "an invaluable resource to the first-year seminar when trained and empowered as part of a teaching team" (Strommer, 1999, p. 51).

Peer Leadership

The subsequent section addresses the following: theoretical support for the concept of peer leadership, patterns of usage and an overview of peer leaders and freshman seminars.

Theoretical Perspectives

Peer leaders in first year seminars are part of a larger group of students who perform a wide array of services for their peers (Ender & Kay, 2001). The theoretical foundations underlying the work that these students perform are the same, and there is a wealth of empirical support and literature for engaging students as paraprofessionals in a variety of university settings (Ender & Kay, 2002; Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Studies ranging from The Hazen Report (1968), to the more recent findings by Astin (1993) have documented how colleges and universities shape students' development and note with interest the powerful impact of peer group influence on individual students. For example, Heath (1968) studied 73 students at one college to look at "three randomly selected groups of students at different points in their college career and to identify the determinants of that development" (p. 77). Heath found that roommates were

a powerful determinant producing change in students and that the interpersonal relationship that existed between students during their college years greatly impacted their maturation process. He concluded that "educators tend to ignore the powerful maturing effects that a young person's personal friendships may have" (p. 5).

Similarly, Chickering's (1969) landmark theory of student development in colleges and universities, in which he identified seven major "vectors," (developmental milestones, developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, developing purpose and developing integrity) in relation to six major facets of the college setting (clarity and consistency of objectives; institutional size; curriculum, teaching and evaluation; residence hall arrangements; faculty and administration; and friends, groups, and student culture), also recognized the importance of peers. He argued that "relationships with close friends and peer groups, or sub-cultures, are primary forces influencing student development in college" (p. 253) and concluded that "a student's most important teacher is another student" (p. 253). In the same manner, based on their synthesis of over 2,500 empirical studies on the

positive impact of peer interaction outside the classroom, Terenzini, Pascarella and Blimling (1996) concluded that peer groups had a positive impact on the learning and cognitive development of their peers:

When peer interactions involve educational or intellectual activities or topics, the effects are almost always beneficial to students; and discussing racial/ethnic issues in student-peer interactions appears to contribute to students' overall academic development and to gains in general knowledge, critical thinking, and analytic and problem-solving skills. (pp. 3-4)

Using a national sample of approximately 500,000 students from 1,300 institutions, Astin tracked the impact of colleges and universities on the development of students over a 25 year period. One of his conclusions was that "the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398) and the most influential source for values, beliefs, and goals (Astin, 1993). Further, he found that student to student interaction had the strongest effect on students' leadership development. In explaining how peer leadership affected students' learning and development, he

maintained that peer leadership exercised a dual psychological and sociological influence. From an individual (psychological) perspective, the peer group constitutes a group of individuals from whom the student seeks acceptance and approval. From a group (sociological) perspective, the peer group establishes and enforces norms for the group to which the student has a desire to conform.

Use of Peer Leaders

During the last forty years, numerous studies have documented the broad, increasing use of peer leaders, in a variety of higher education settings (Brown & Zunker, 1966; Carkhuff, 1968; Carkhuff & Truax, 1965; Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993; Cuseo, 1991; Delworth, Sherwood, & Zunker, 1974; Ender 1984; Hart, 1995; Powell, 1959; Rabiecki & Brabeck, 1985; Ragle & Krone, 1989; Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1996; Winston & Ender, 1988). These studies reveal the range of descriptors used to identify the roles (peer educator, peer mentor, student assistant, student paraprofessional, peer advisor and peer leader) and a host of interventions in which peer leaders are engaged (coaching, mentoring, counseling, modeling, supporting and teaching). In 1984, Ender provided the following definition to encompass

these diverse descriptors and roles of students who help other students on college campuses:

Paraprofessionals are students who have been selected and trained to offer educational services to their peers. These services are intentionally designed to assist in the adjustment, satisfaction and persistence of students toward attainment of their educational goals. Students performing in paraprofessional roles are compensated for their services and supervised by qualified professionals. (p. 324)

A number of studies have affirmed the increase in students in leadership roles in educational institution: 67% in 1969 to 83% in 1993 (Carns, Carns & Wright, 1993; Powell, 1959; Zunker, 1975; Zunker & Brown 1966). Carns, Carns and Wright (1993) investigated the extent to which the use of paraprofessionals on university campuses had changed from Zunker's (1975) study. They reported that 91% of responding institutions (n = 220) indicated that they used students in new student orientation activities, 22% in student religious centers, 30% in student social centers, 55% in student judiciary programs, 20% in religious centers, 33% in advising programs, 54% in student activities, 34% in counseling, 96%

in residence life, 73% in reading/study habits centers, 34% in placement centers, and 39% in academic department.

Numerous studies have also documented the *effectiveness* of students in these leadership roles (Brown & Myers, 1975; Brown & Zunker, 1966; Carkhuff, 1968; Carkhuff & Truax, 1965; Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993; Cuseo, 1991; Delworth, Sherwood, & Casaburri, 1974; Ender, 1984; Hart, 1995; Powell, 1959; Rabiecki & Brabeck 1985; Ragle & Krone 1989; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996; Winston & Ender, 1988; Zunker, 1975). In 1975, Brown and Myers (1975) conducted a study of freshmen enrolled at a university in Idaho. The 233 students were assessed about their attitudes toward academic advisors. The findings revealed that students who were advised by student advisors had more positive attitudes toward their advisors and lower dropout rates when compared to those students who were advised by faculty advisors. Student advisors were also seen as sympathetic, while faculty advisors were viewed as carrying out a required obligation. Similarly, Rabiecki and Brabeck (1985) studied 146 freshmen who were served by a peer designed peer advisement program. Over 91% of these students reported that the peer advisement program helped

them adjust to campus life and that the program reduced the need to seek other counseling services.

As a result of his synthesis of a range of empirical studies on how college affects students, Cuseo (1991) contended that peers were more capable of eliciting the involvement of first-year students in classroom settings than faculty or staff because they were less intimidating given the similarities in their ages. He also hailed peer leadership as a more cost-effective way of providing student support in comparison to the numbers that could be reached simply by professional staff. Cuseo's views mirrored those of Levin, Glass and Meiser (1984), who reviewed the research literature that compared the cost-effectiveness of four academic support strategies: peer tutoring, computer-assisted instruction, lengthened instructional time, and reduced class size. They found peer tutoring to be the most cost-effective support strategy; more than twice as cost-effective as computer-assisted instructed.

Carns, Carns and Wright (1993), in their study of the use of undergraduates as paraprofessionals at 4-year institutions ($n = 220$), argued that the reported increase in the use of paraprofessionals on university campuses indicated

that "the role of paraprofessionals is no longer experimental and has become essential to campus life" (p. 362). Given the findings that peers exert influence on each other (Astin, 1993), institutions of higher education have recognized the power of peers and have sought ways to facilitate collaborative experiences between first-year and upper-level students. The use of peer leaders to help facilitate freshman seminars is one example.

Peer Leaders and Freshman Seminars

Students who serve as co-teachers in freshman seminar courses are generally called peer leaders (National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programs: 1994, 2000). While the term "peer instructor" may appear to more accurately describe the work that these students perform, the term "peer leader" is used by most institutions that engage upper-class students to assist in first-year seminar courses (Hamid, 2001). In recent years, the trend of using peer leaders has been increasing and is documented in several national studies. According to the most recent National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programs at 1,013 institutions (Linder, 2002), 749 (73.9% of respondents) reported that they offered a special course for first-year

students called a first-year seminar, colloquium or student success course, and 18% of these institutions indicated that they used peer leaders in these courses. Similarly, as may be seen in Figure 2a, the most recent National Survey of First-Year Academic Practices (Barefoot, 2001) revealed that between 20 and 40% of the respondents ($n = 993$) reported using upper-level peers as co-teachers of first-year seminars, occasionally or frequently.

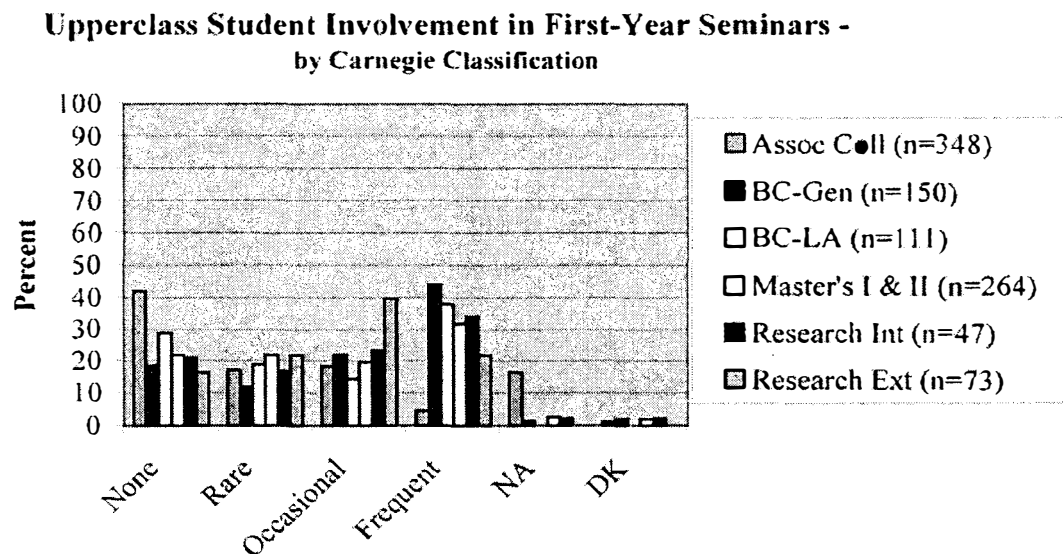


Figure 2a. Upper-class Student Involvement in First-Year Seminars by Carnegie Classification

<http://www.brevard.edu/fyc/survey2002/findings.htm>

The survey, which investigated a range of policies and practices in first year academic programs and curriculum, also revealed that first year seminars were the most commonly used institutional structure in which undergraduate students were involved and practiced intentional interaction with first-year students.

In 1999, Hamid and VanHook surveyed peer leader programs across the U.S. to learn more about the practice of using peer leaders as co-teachers of first-year seminars. Data were gathered from 40 schools, representing a total of 1371 peer leaders serving approximately 17,000 students. While the institutions represented varying types and sizes, the average number of peer leaders for an institution was 35 (range 16-150), and almost twice as many peer leaders were women as men. The most common reasons the 40 institutions gave for supporting a peer leader program at their institution were:

1. Peer leaders establish good connections with first-year students.
2. Peer leaders are role models for success.
3. Peer leaders serve as mentors.
4. Peer leaders can be an academic resource for students.
5. Peer leaders can be an extension of orientation.

6. A peer leader can bridge the gap between students and teachers.

7. This type of program provides leadership opportunities for outstanding students.

Thus it can be concluded that the trend of using peer leaders in freshman seminars is growing and institutions are recognizing that students deliver a variety of services and assistance to their fellow students.

Impact of Peer Leaders in Freshman Seminars

Clearly, colleges and universities shape students' development and the impact of the peer group on individual students is powerful (Astin, 1993; Chickering, 1969; Heath, 1968). Indeed, it seems reasonable to conclude that students listen to their peers and learn a great deal, perhaps the most, from other students. In their synthesis of over 500 studies on small group collaboration, Cooper and Robinson (1998) reported that collaborative learning had a "robust" positive effect on such educational outcomes as (a) academic achievement, (b) student retention, and (c) attitude toward the subject matter. Research on peer teaching indicates that both the peer learner and the peer teacher learn significantly from collaborative

learning experiences and that peer teachers demonstrate deeper levels of understanding for the information they convey to their peers and attain a stronger grasp for the course content (Bargh & Schul, 1980; Benware & Deci, 1984; Whitman, 1988).

Based on survey data from 31,661 students at 61 institutions, the National Study of First-Year Seminar Learning Outcomes conducted by the Policy Center on the First-Year of College (Swing, 2001) found that the use of undergraduate teaching assistants in freshman seminars was correlated with higher scores assigned to learning outcomes and satisfaction than those of students who participated in freshman seminars that did not use peer leaders.

The use of peer leaders in first-year seminars also appears to have a positive impact on the retention of first-year students. According to Tinto (1987), one of the major reasons for students dropping out of college is failure to establish a social network. Peer leaders are being used to bridge that gap. The positive effects of collaborative learning on student retention is documented in Tinto's (1987) research with adult students which revealed that the single most important predictor of students' persistence to graduation was whether they were members of a peer learning

group. Freshman to sophomore retention rates that were tracked at the University of the Pacific for a five-year period showed an increase in the rate of first-year to sophomore year retention by more than 6% (Hamid, 2001). This increase correlated with the existence of that institution's peer leader program. Similarly, Hamid (2001) reported that Lee University's freshman to sophomore retention rate for a 5-year period jumped by more than 10% following the addition of a peer leader component to its freshman seminar course.

Following an extensive review of the literature on teaching and learning research in higher education, McKeachie (1986) concluded: "the best answer to the question of what is the most effective method of teaching is that it depends on the goal, the student, the content, and the teachers. But the next best answer is 'students teaching other students'" (p.63). In a similar vein, Gardner (1996) pronounced, "I have heard of freshman seminars literally coming and going from campuses... I have never heard of a freshman seminar that added the peer leader component and then subsequently dropped this feature of the course (p. 2).

While we know a lot about the impact of peer leadership programs on students, we know almost nothing about the effect of such programs on the peer leaders themselves.

In a study of 40 peer leadership programs, Hamid & VanHook (1999) found that peer leader comments returned with the survey provided anecdotal evidence about the benefits of the peer leading experiences on the peer leaders themselves. While not a focus of the study, these anecdotal reports suggested that the peer leaders perceived their experiences to have contributed to their personal growth and development. Some of the benefits cited by these peer leaders included:

- Personal satisfaction that comes from helping others;
- Development of transferable and marketable skills such as communication, problem-solving, creativity, analytical and critical thinking skills;
- Opportunities to learn more about themselves;
- Opportunities for personal growth;
- Increased understanding of their own learning processes (Hamid & VanHook, p.86).

This study will examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars.

Social Interdependence Theory

History and Development

Social interdependence theory served as the conceptual framework for the study. This section will trace the development and use of social interdependence theory and

will explain its tenets and principles. According to Johnson and Johnson (1998), co-directors of the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota, conversations on the notion of social interdependence began in the early 1900s when Koffka, a founder of the Gestalt School of Psychology, proposed that groups were dynamic wholes characterized by interdependence among its members. Lewin (1948) refined Koffka's notions and purported that: a) the essence of a group was the interdependence among members (created by common goals) which resulted in the group being a "dynamic whole." Any changes in the state of any member or subgroup changed the state of any other member or sub group; and b) an intrinsic state of tension within group members motivated movement toward the accomplishment of the desired common goals. The notion of social interdependence was further refined by Deutsch in 1949. He contended that members of interrelated groups were more conscientious toward one another, understood each other better, influenced each other more, were more likely to change, and showed more internalization of group norms than members of less cohesive groups. In addition, he added the concepts of cooperation and competition in relation to

the types of interaction that exist among group members (Deutsch, 1949).

The theory of social interdependence seeks to explain how individuals interact with each other and how that in turn influences the outcome of their interactions. Two types of interdependence are posited: cooperative and competitive. According to the theory, *positive* interdependence (cooperation) produces promotive interaction, while *negative* interdependence (competition) creates oppositional interaction. No interdependence (individualistic effort) results in an absence of interaction. The theory also posits that while negative interdependence leads to individuals hindering each other's success (such as, lower output and achievement, more negative relationships and lower social competence), positive social interdependence, leads to greater achievement, more positive relationships and greater psychological health and social competence (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991).

According to Johnson and Johnson (1989), social interdependence provides a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of collaborative learning. Collaborative learning, where individuals encourage and

facilitate each other's efforts to achieve the required group goal, is based on and represents positive interdependence since the individuals in the group share common goals and the outcomes of each person's interactions are affected by or are contingent on the actions of the others. Thus, the theory provides a conceptual framework for teachers to promote learning (cooperative learning) and improve instruction (teaching teams).

Between 1898 and 1989, researchers conducted more than 575 experimental studies and 100 correlational studies on social interdependence and productivity and achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Based on that vast body of work, Johnson and Johnson (1989) concluded that "the overall body of research on social interdependence has considerable validity and generalizability rarely found in the educational literature." Moreover, Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1993) have contended that the application of social interdependence theory and research to education is one of the most successful and widespread applications of social psychology to practice.

Social Interdependence Theory and Peer Leadership

Although one-room schoolhouses have declined, the tradition of using collaborative learning through peer

tutoring to enhance learning has continued.

Researchers of cooperative learning have shown that positive peer relationships are essential to college success.

When framed within the context of peer leadership, social interdependence theory provides a sound theoretical basis for looking at the effects of peer leadership experiences on peer leaders in first-year seminars. Since positive interdependence leads to promotive interaction (e.g. the giving and receiving of help and assistance, the exchanging of resources and information, giving and receiving feedback, challenging each other's reasoning and encouraging each other to achieve), if the experiences of the peer leaders are characterized by positive interdependence, one would expect these peer leaders to be positive about their experience as peer leaders and that these peer leaders would feel that they had achieved the goals or tasks of the group. If, on the other hand, the experiences of the peer leaders are characterized by oppositional interaction (as involving bad relations within the group, with individuals opposing and hindering each other's efforts), then one would expect that their experiences would be perceived as negative ones.

This study will also seek to find out the kind of social interdependence that peer leaders experience in their roles as peer leaders of first-year seminars and the outcomes that emerge from their interactions with the first-year students that they serve. If the theory holds, the more positive the interdependence, the more positive peer leaders will describe their experiences. Thus, social interdependence theory will not only serve as the conceptual framework for the study, influencing the framing of the questionnaire to be used, but also as a means or lens for analyzing the data.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars. The research questions which framed and guided the study were:

1. How do peer leaders describe their peer leadership experiences?
2. Does social interdependence theory explain the kind of peer leader experiences that emerge?
 - a. Is the type of interdependence that exists among the group competitive or cooperative?
 - b. In what ways did the type of interaction that exists affect the outcome of the experiences?

This chapter details the method and procedures used in the conduct of the study. Included are discussions of the research design, method, procedures, data analysis, and validity and reliability.

Research Design

A qualitative approach, specifically a multi-site (three) case study design, was chosen to examine the experiences of peer leaders at three universities. According to Firestone (1993), qualitative research methods

are built on a phenomenological worldview which assumes "that reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation"(p. 16).

Consequently, qualitative research seeks to grasp the social situation from the point of view of the participants with the researcher becoming "'immersed' in the phenomenon of interest" (p.17). Since the study sought to get at the perceptions of peer leaders, "see it" from their perspectives, a qualitative approach provided the most appropriate way to do so. Case study design allowed for using multiple methods of getting at the experiences of peer leaders in context, and becoming immersed in the phenomenon under study, the peer leader experience. Using multiple sites allowed for examining the phenomenon as it operates in different contexts.

According to Firestone and Herriott (1984), multi-site case studies are preferable to single-case studies because (1) the findings are more credible, and 2) the study is seen as more robust. Further, using multiple cases is a recognizable means of enhancing the external validity and generalizability of the findings (Merriam, 2001) since "by looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases... we

can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29).

Method

This section details the methods used in the conduct of the study. Included are discussions of the site and population, sources of data: questionnaires, individual interviews, institutional publications and field notes.

Site and Population

Peer leaders from three institutions, in different geographic areas of the country, served as the participants and sites for the study. The three sites were selected because of their reputation for having exemplary programs, therefore affording the opportunity to study the experiences of peer leaders in what were considered to be among the best programs of their kind in the nation. The three institutions chosen are identified by the following pseudonyms: Blue University, Yellow University and Pink State University.

Blue University, located in the southeastern region of the United States, is recognized by the higher education community as a model for freshman seminar programs nationwide. Yellow University, located in the northeastern

U.S., was recently featured in *Time Magazine* as having an exemplary peer leader program. The program at Pink State University, which is located in the Midwest, is an award winning program, recognized by the Templeton Foundation for its emphasis on character building. In addition, the program director is nationally recognized for her outstanding work in the area of first-year studies.

Combined, the three sites had approximately 120 peer leaders: Blue University, 50; Yellow University, 40; Pink University, 30. It was hoped that at least 70% of these peer leaders would agree to participate in the study. Such a sample would be small enough (84 responses) to provide a manageable volume of data, yet would represent well the overall population of peer leaders at the institutions selected. As it turned out, 69% (83 peer leaders) participated in the study.

Sources of Data

On each campus, data sources included: questionnaires, individual interviews with selected peer leaders and program directors, institutional documents, and the researcher's field notes.

Questionnaires

A questionnaire (see Appendix A) served as the predominant source of data. It was designed by the researcher to probe the peer leaders' perceptions of their peer leadership experiences, and to determine the kind of outcomes they perceived had emerged from that experience. Prior to disseminating the questionnaire, the researcher field tested the questionnaire on 12 peer leaders from an institution not involved in the study to verify that the questions captured the experiences of peer leaders and were clear in tone and wording.

The questionnaire consisted of 11 open-ended questions which required the respondents to reflect on their peer leadership experiences. In addition, the questionnaire required demographic information (see Appendix A) about the peer leaders: gender, length of time he/she served as a peer leader, grade point average (G.P.A) and classification. The responses to the questions served as the primary source of data for the study, and the themes derived from these data were used to generate the questions for the on-site interviews.

Individual Interviews

On-site interviews with peer leaders were conducted to gather data about the peer leader experience and to verify the information gained from the questionnaire. Interviews were guided by responses to the questionnaire and sought to clarify or verify unclear information and gain a deeper understanding of the experience. The interview questions (see Appendix B) were open-ended and encouraged the respondents to reflect thoughtfully about their experiences as peer leaders. Sixteen peer leader interviews were conducted: 6 from Blue University, 5 from Yellow University and 5 from Pink University and there were 5 interviews that were conducted with program directors: 2 from Blue University, 2 from Yellow University and 1 from Pink State University. A total of 21 interviews were conducted.

Institutional Publications

Official and unofficial publications from the three institutions relative to the operation of their peer leadership programs were collected and analyzed. These were seen as a valuable source of data and helped give meaning and provide context for the data that emerged from the questionnaire and interviews. These publications included written materials on training, teaching resources, and

advertisements pieces related to the foundation, formation and facilitation of each institution's peer leader program. This data also provided the researcher with information about the institution's culture, and afforded insight into the peer leaders' work situation and environment.

Field notes

During her two-day on-site visits to the three campuses, the researcher took field notes about the culture of the campus: its background, traditions and customs. These notes helped the researcher to better understand the context in which the peer leaders function.

Procedure

The researcher contacted the "gatekeepers" of each peer leader program at the identified sites to request permission to conduct the research on his/her campus and to secure their help in conducting the study. Upon gaining verbal approval, a letter was sent to each program director to sign and return, giving their formal approval. A copy of this is in Appendix C. Then, IRB approval was secured from the University of Tennessee to conduct the study.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires to be completed by peer leaders were sent to the peer leadership program director at each site with directions for the administration of the form. The director was asked to explain the nature of the study to the peer leaders and to encourage them to participate, while also explaining that their involvement was voluntary and that there would be no penalty for not completing the form. The dissemination of the form was guided by directions provided in a cover letter (see Appendix A). Each peer leader was asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the researcher in the self-addressed envelope provided. While the questionnaire was color coded to identify the site, in order to protect the identity of the respondents, participants were not asked to put their names on the questionnaire. Completion of the questionnaire was considered to constitute voluntary, informed consent. All of this was explained in the cover letter attached to the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

Interviews

At the bottom of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to participate in an individual interview to be held at a later time on their campus. They were asked to

indicate their interest in participating in such an interview by completing, tearing off and sending the separated reply in another envelope provided. Forty-two students returned this form: 20 from Blue University, 13 from Yellow University and 9 from Pink State University. Sixteen students were randomly chosen from separate lists by gender to get a balance of male and female peer leaders.

Follow-up communication to the sample of selected students provided information about the specific day and time for their interview. Participants were informed that all names, including that of the institution, would be removed, that their participation was voluntary. This was then followed by a visit to each site for the purpose of conducting interviews with the peer leaders who volunteered for such interviews. Peer leaders were assigned a time slot that matched their schedules.

At the beginning of the interview, each participant was reminded that they had signed a form indicating their agreement to the interview session and their right to withdraw from the interview at anytime was reaffirmed. The nature and purpose of the study were discussed, as was how the data would be collected and reported, and how their responses would be protected from identification. The

interview questions were based on the data generated from the questionnaire responses. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and the researcher took notes during the interviews.

On each campus the researcher met with and interviewed the director of that institution's peer leader program. The data from these interviews provided information about the institution's peer leader program, the logistics of the program's operation, and the culture of the institution. This information gave meaning and context to the data that emerged from the students' questionnaires.

Collection of Institutional Publications

The researcher solicited the assistance of the program director at each site to provide official and unofficial publications relative to the operation of that institution's peer leader program. These documents were numerous and varied and included training manuals, reports, recruitment and publicity materials. The researcher also obtained materials and documents that were mentioned by peer leaders during the interviews. Table 3.1 shows the documents collected and analyzed from each site.

Field notes

During the researcher's visit to each site, she made field notes of the surroundings, informal conversations with students in common areas, like the school's dining facilities, and any experiences that might give added insights about the unique culture of each campus. She also made notes about her impressions and responses to the interviews directly after conducting the interviews. All of this information informed the researcher about the cultural uniqueness of each campus.

Human Subjects Process

The researcher made every effort to ensure that confidentiality was maintained and preserved throughout the study. The three sites were identified by pseudonyms in all phases of the study. Completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher without including any personal identification information. Interviewees were not identified by their names and the program directors at each site were not given access to the data gathered.

Table 3.1

Documents Collected and Analyzed from each Site

<i>Site</i>	<i>Material</i>
Blue	Peer Leader manual
	University 101 web site
	Training materials
	Peer Leader Toolkit
	Peer Leader recruitment materials
	Freshman seminar course materials
Yellow	Peer Leader manual
	Center for New Students website
	Peer Leader video
	Workshop Training materials
	Freshman Seminar Custom Published Text
	with Corresponding instructor's manual
Pink	Peer Leader manual
	Website for First-Year Programs
	Training materials

Further, participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. All data will be kept in a locked cabinet in office of the chairperson for this study for three years.

Data Analysis

Questionnaires

Questionnaire responses were collected from 83 respondents. Table 3.2 shows the distribution of questionnaire respondents by university site. The questionnaire contained 11 open-ended questions; the responses were transcribed and entered into the computer by question to allow for retrieval and rearrangement. The data for each site were color coded and each response for every question was assigned a number by site. The data were analyzed by question and site, and then comparatively to arrive at the themes and categories that emerged in response to the questions.

Table 3.2***Questionnaire Respondents by University Site***

<i>Site</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Blue	36
Yellow	28
Pink	19
Total	83

To analyze these data, the researcher followed the eight steps established by Tesch (1990) for analyzing qualitative data: read all transcriptions to get the big picture, select and identify fundamental meanings, make a list of all topics that emerge from the meanings, code the information based on identified meanings, identify categories that emerge from the data, decide on a term to describe each category, assemble the data that belong to common categories, and record the data that matches the final categories that were identified (pp.142-145). The data were analyzed by site and then comparatively to arrive at the themes and categories that emerged in response to the questions.

Interviews

Using the same procedures with the interview notes collected as was used in analyzing the questionnaires, the interview data were analyzed for the themes that developed by site and across sites, and then compared to the categories derived from the analysis of the questionnaires as verification of their relevance.

Institutional Publications

The materials collected at each site were analyzed to identify the context and framework in which the peer leaders at each site operated and to allow for building a rich thick description of each case. Using the same procedure as was used in analyzing the questionnaire and interview data, these documents and institutional materials were analyzed for the themes that emerged by site and across sites, and then compared to the categories derived from the questionnaires and the interviews.

Field notes

During visits to each site, the researcher took observational field notes about the settings, the people, and the activities observed in her two day visits on each campus. These notes were used to gain an understanding of the physical layout of each site and context in which peer

leaders operated. Further, they provided data about the interactions between peer leaders and students, and administrators and faculty. It also allowed the researcher to get a sense of how the institution perceived the roles of the peer leaders. These field notes add to the richness of case descriptions.

Collectively, the data analyses were used to develop individual case reports and then to compare the cases across sites. This was done by comparing the themes that had emerged from each site and identifying the themes that were common to all three sites (cross case analysis) about the experiences of peer leaders. These findings were then used to consider the relation between the peer leaders' experiences and social interdependence theory.

Reliability and Validity

To enhance the validity and reliability of the study, the decisions and actions of the researcher were documented from the start of the study through its completion. This documentation served as an audit trail for the research. By employing multiple sources of data: questionnaire, interviews, institutional publications and field notes, the researcher was able to triangulate the findings and to look for points of convergence in all the data that were

collected. Further, the interviews that were conducted following the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, served as a form of "member check" to verify the themes that emerge.

Using three sites helped to "maximize the diversity in the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2001), and by providing rich, thick descriptions, readers will be able to see if and how the reality matches the situations described. All of these efforts sought to substantiate the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Chapter 4

BLUE UNIVERSITY

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars in three different contexts: Blue University, Yellow University and Pink State University. The methods used to collect data involved a questionnaire with open-ended questions, on-site interviews with selected peer leaders and program directors at each site, institutional documents about the peer leadership program, and researcher field notes about each site. Data were collected about the peer leaders' experiences at Blue University from 36 peer leader questionnaires, 6 interviews with peer leaders, 2 interviews with program directors, and institutional publications and field notes collected during a two-day visit to the campus. The data were analyzed inductively to derive the themes that emerged from and across the sources of data that characterized the experiences of peer leaders at Blue University.

This chapter provides a description of Blue University and of the experiences of peer leaders at Blue University. The first part of the chapter includes a general description of Blue University, its freshman seminar

program and the peer leader component of the program. Names have been withheld to insure confidentiality. The second part of the chapter focuses on the experiences of the peer leaders and the themes emerging from the data that characterized those experiences.

Portrait of Blue University

Walking across the campus of Blue University, one is struck by the colorful merging of the old and new. Chartered in 1801 as a College, a part of the southern public college movement spurred by Thomas Jefferson, the original Blue University campus is a visit to the past. Within four city blocks stand ten buildings from the early 19th century, restored to their original appearance and used as living quarters, classrooms and faculty offices. Newer buildings encircle the historic section of the campus.

Today, Blue University's campus occupies the original 1801 site in the capital city of a southern state. With a student population of over 25,000, the university has grown from its origins in one building to 155 facilities on 358 acres. In 1906, the institution was rechartered for the final time and it now offers more than 350 undergraduate and graduate courses of study. Programs range from liberal

arts and sciences to business, law, medicine and other professional studies, many of which have been widely recognized for their academic excellence.

Freshman Seminar Program

Blue University began a freshman seminar course in 1972 as an educational experiment in response to the student riots in protest of the Vietnam War, other national societal injustices, and local campus concerns. With direction and support from the president of the institution, the primary goal for the course was "to build trust, understanding, and open lines of communication between students, faculty, staff, and administrators," explained one of the program directors. The key aims were to encourage students to develop more positive attitudes and behaviors towards the University, and to increase student retention to the sophomore year and ultimately to graduation from the university.

Thirty years later, Blue University's freshman seminar program has evolved to meet the changing needs and characteristics of first-year students, the institution, and society. The university has earned a reputation as an institution committed to the success of first-year students, and its freshman seminar program has served as a

model that has been replicated at numerous institutions in the U.S. and around the world. A major national weekly magazine recently ranked Blue University's program for first-year students number one in the U.S.

Today, this one-semester three credit hour course boasts 105 sections, each with approximately 20 students. It is taught by faculty and administrators, and co-taught by peer leaders. While Blue University's freshman seminar is an elective course for new students, over 80% of first-year students participate in a section of the course. The course's objectives and methods of delivery are designed to introduce students to the culture of higher education; to expose students to Blue University's traditions, services, facilities, and resources; to provide a support group of peers and a faculty/staff mentor; and to introduce students to significant academic content that will contribute to their likelihood of success in college.

The freshman seminar program at Blue University, including the peer leader component, functions as a single administrative Unit and is housed in a charming two-story colonial house on campus. This Unit reports directly to the Office of the Provost, the chief academic officer of the institution. There is a strong affiliation between the

academic and student affairs sectors designed to ensure that first year students succeed at Blue University. Not only does the freshman seminar program hold a unique position in the institution's administrative structure, allowing the program to build a strong partnership between the academic faculty and the student affairs professional staff in delivering the seminar, but it facilitates the development of a variety of collaborative programs to assist students in making a smoother transition to college life. Examples of these programs include the freshman living and Learning Centers in residence halls which help meet the academic and personal needs of first-year students and the Academic Center for Excellence which offers tutoring services. According to the school's web site, Blue University's "commitment to first-year student success through curricular innovation and co-curricular programs that enhance student involvement would not be possible without the encouragement and unusually strong financial and intangible support from central administration."

Peer Leader Program

After seeing the positive impact of peer leadership programs at places such as Marietta College and Kent State University, the directors of Blue University's freshman

seminar program decided to follow their example and to add a peer leadership program to its freshman seminar. Since its inception in the 1993-1994 academic year, the peer leader program at Blue University has been a vital component of Blue's freshman seminar course.

The rationale underlying the Peer Leaders Program is the notion that first-year students relate particularly well to exceptional upper-class students and through interaction with them will be encouraged to excel academically and as future campus leaders. Thus peer leaders are seen as role models for first-year students. Moreover, it is perceived that some of the peer leaders will be inspired by their experience to consider pursuing careers in higher education as teachers and administrators. Since its founding, participation in Blue University's peer leader program has grown from 25 undergraduates to a high of 80.

Each year, the recruitment process for new peer leaders begins with an advertisement blitz of flyers, announcements, posters and banners, saturating the campus and encouraging students to participate in the program. In addition, nominations and endorsements are sought from faculty. Blue University's peer leader program seeks to

recruit "outstanding" junior and senior level students to serve as role models for incoming first-year students, explained one of the program directors. Students must have a minimum grade point average of 3.0 and demonstrate leadership in other areas of University life, (e.g., student government, fraternity and sorority councils, community service groups, residence life, honor societies, social awareness organizations). Each applicant to the program is subjected to a rigorous selection process which includes written essays, recommendations and interviews. The timeline for the entire process of recruitment and selection, which appears in Appendix E, demonstrates the emphasis and meticulous efforts that the university expends in recruiting and selecting its peer leaders, and in ensuring that they are "outstanding".

Applications are reviewed by a committee whose members include the directors of the program and former peer leaders. Individual interviews are conducted as part of the selection process. Once the selection of peer leaders is completed, the directors of the program begin the task of matching and pairing peer leaders with faculty members who were invited and have agreed to teach a section of Blue's freshman seminar course. To accomplish this, peer leaders

and faculty instructors are invited to attend a "mixer" to see who connects with whom. Personality styles, majors, and availability to teach certain timeslots, are factors that determine who will be paired with whom, although faculty members can request to work with a particular peer leader. One of the program directors is responsible for making the final assignments. Assignments are based on a first-come first-serve basis. "It basically boils down to a matter of scheduling--when one is available to teach and this means that not all faculty who request a peer leader are able to get one" explains one of the program directors. Once the peer leaders have been matched with an instructor, they become a part of a prestigious group on campus and their training begins. The training is intensive, and occurs prior to and during the time peer leaders participate in the program. Blue's peer leaders are required to complete a 2-day training workshop prior to the experience and to enroll in a three credit-hour academic course, *Educational Leadership and Policies: The Teacher as Manager*, while they are serving as peer leaders.

In reviewing copies of materials used during training, it is clear that peer leaders address a variety of issues and topics, including: Listening to Others, Effective

Communication and Dealing with Sticky Situations. These topics are covered through creative mediums such as case studies and group exercises. For example, the peer leaders participate in an exercise on Values Clarification. Through a series of exercises and case studies, peer leaders are taught that values clarification is not designed to:

1. Transmit a particular value or value system,
2. Serve as therapy,
3. Change people's values,
4. Entertain,
5. Evaluate or diagnose people, or
6. Save the world

In their training, peer leaders explore the question, "What does it mean to be a Peer Leader?" They also use the *Peer Leader Toolkit*, a "how-to" manual of sorts for training, to explore an array of issues including peer leader roles and responsibilities, peer leader archetypes, freshman characteristics and tips on mentoring undergraduate students. According to the program directors, one of the goals of the training workshop is to set a benchmark for what is expected in the classroom, while the course is designed to help the peer leaders process and integrate their classroom experiences and responsibilities.

It is clear that a great deal of effort is expended on preparing peer leaders and on insuring that they have a clear understanding of their role. The students who participated in the study were subjected to intense training and their perceptions of their role, role expectations and anticipated outcomes were framed by the content of this intense training. The success of the training in preparing them for the role is measurable, in part, by the perceptions of the peer leaders. Of the 36 respondents, 32 (88%) said that the experience met or exceeded their expectations and that they had a clear sense of what was ahead for them.

In terms of the peer leaders at Blue University who participated in the study, of the 36 who responded to the questionnaire, 31(86%) were females and 5(14%) were males. These students had served an average of one semester as a peer leader and 21(58%) said they had a peer leader when they were freshmen. While only one respondent had a grade point average (GPA) that was less than 3.0, 15 reported a GPA of more than 3.0, and 20 peer leaders a GPA of more than 3.5. Two peer leaders were juniors, 16 were seniors and 16 were graduate students. Two respondents did not indicate their class.

The responses of peer leaders reported in this chapter are coded by gender, classification, number of semesters they served as a peer leader, grade point average (G.P.A) and whether they had a peer leader as a freshman student. The codes will appear after each student quotation. The categories with the codes and their meanings are in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1.

Demographic information on Blue University's peer leaders

<i>Category</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Gender	m	Male
	f	Female
Classification	s	Sophomore
	j	Junior
	sr	Senior
	gr	Graduate
Semester(s) Served	1	one semester
	2	two semesters
	3	three semesters
	4	four semesters
G.P.A	a	less than 3.0
	b	between 3.0 and 3.5
	c	over 3.5
Had a Peer Leader	y	Yes
	n	No

Characteristics of the Experience

Data were derived from: questionnaires, interviews with selected peer leaders and the 2 program directors, institutional publications about the peer leadership program and researcher field notes on her campus visit. Eight themes emerged from these data. The experience of peer leaders at Blue University was characterized by: (1) Positive Interactions; (2) Helped their Students Succeed; (3) the Importance and Prestige of the Position; (4) the Influence of their Peer Leaders; (5) the Desire to be liked; (6) Love and Loyalty to Blue University; (7) Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles; and (8) the Impact on (their) Peer Leader Development.

Positive Interactions

Overwhelmingly, peer leaders described the experience in terms of the positive interactions they had with students and with their instructors and the positive impact they had as a result of those interactions. As one student explained:

My students really seemed to like me and I got along great with them. They learned quickly that I was their friend, my role was to help them, and I was constantly getting phone calls or emails from them. I feel that I

really connected with them. I feel that I was a very positive role model for them and they felt the same way. When I see some of them around campus from time to time, they still remember me and stop to chat and tell me all the things going on in their world. I think it is great! (f/gr/1/c/n)

Thirty-two of the 36 respondents (89%) indicated that their experience as a peer leader was a very positive one and 26 of them (72%) cited specific examples of positive interactions as the basis of this perception. One student shared,

My relationship with each student was wonderful because they looked up to me and accepted me as a person. We would talk about school, religion, and politics and they even opened up to me on a personal level. We shared many laughs together but we also had some serious discussions. (f/sr/1/b/n)

Another peer leader stated,

My instructor was the mentor I hadn't had yet. I probably got the most out of the class than anyone else. I realize now that not only did I get to give, I received greatly from the experience. I enjoyed

interacting with my teacher and have a wonderful relationship with her. (f/gr/1/c/y)

Overwhelmingly, the respondents believed that being peers helped to engender this positive interaction. "My students were my peers. We saw each other on campus and talked outside of class. I feel that my students were comfortable with coming to me with their problems and concerns," (f/sr/1/c/n) explained one student. And another revealed,

They (the students) did not hesitate to call or email me with any questions. I was younger than the instructor and I stayed up later. I was the middleman between them and the instructor. I was an available resource for them. (f/sr/1/c/y)

The peer leaders seemed to identify being a friend as a key component of the positive interactions they had.

I was not only their student teacher but I was also their friend. I would see my students on campus and we would stop and talk or they would wave and shout hello; that was a wonderful feeling. My students and I had a great relationship. (f/sr/1/c/n)

Another concurred:

I think they knew that I really liked them and wanted to be their friend. With most of my students, I was a friend: we visited before and after class, would meet for meals to talk, would randomly run into each other around campus. I was someone they looked up to but also someone they could talk to and feel comfortable around. (f/j/1/c/n)

Other peer leaders provided tangible ways to explain how these positive interactions occurred.

I had a positive relationship with each student. They had daily journals that they gave me and read and commented on. Given that most of these thoughts were private, I wrote comments and reminded them that they could come to me for help and advice. I think in doing this they felt free to express themselves and relieve themselves of any stresses or concerns. I feel that my relationship was good with all of my students. I made a concerted effort to get to know them all, and I still keep in touch with a couple of students.

(f/sr/1/b/y)

Yet another explained,

I encouraged my students to email me once a week to tell me how they were doing or ask a question. Several

of my students would call me for class or sorority advice. I studied with one of my girls in the class because we were in advanced German together.

(f/gr/1/c/y)

Thirteen peer leaders (36%) indicated that trust was a critical factor in making the interactions with their students positive ones. One student explained,

They would come to me with personal problems and academic problems. My relationship with the students was very open. They talked to me about the most serious issues-- such as failing a class-- and the least serious issues-- such as what to wear to whatever social function they were attending.

(f/sr/1/b/n)

Another peer leader described the kind of trust that developed in the relationship.

The guys invited me to their sporting events and I even met a couple of their girlfriends. I think I seemed intimidating to the girls at first because I am a crucially honest person, but as they got to know me, they really trusted me, valued my opinion and introduced me to their friends. (f/sr/1/c/y)

The interactions between peer leaders and their co-instructors were also described in highly positive terms, despite occasional difficulties, and were attributed to the respect that existed between them. "I had a great faculty instructor to work with, and that allowed me to enjoy the experience to the fullest. He respected my opinion; I was allowed to provide input about tests and grades from a student's perspective," (f/sr/1/c/y) explained one peer leader. Another peer leader offered,

The relationship is like a coach to his players. I enjoyed interacting with my students and had a wonderful relationship with the teacher I worked with. I felt my instructor trusted and valued my opinion. We had a lot of fun!" (m/j/1/b/y)

It is almost impossible to read the responses of Blue University's peer leaders about their experience without being struck by the overwhelmingly positive feelings they had about the experience *because of* the positive interactions they had and the sense that they made a difference through these interactions. One respondent said, "It is such a great and indescribable feeling that you can really make a good and positive impact on other people's

life, especially someone only two-four years younger than yourself." (f/sr/1/b/n)

Helped their Students Succeed

The respondents believed that they would and did affect the lives of first-year students, and as a result of their interactions with them were able to help them succeed. Over 70% gave poignant examples of how they believed they had made a difference in the lives of their first-year students. One peer leader reflected, "I believe I helped contribute to the students feeling comfortable enough to discuss things openly" (f/gr/1/c/y). Another noted,

Sometimes I would give out handouts on volunteer activities or service groups for them to get involved with. A few of the students were so interested in the groups that they became members of the group and made new friends. So I feel I helped them academically and socially. (f/sr/1/c/n)

And yet another reported proudly,

'April' was one of those students who stayed to herself during the first two weeks at school. She was very strongly opinionated. Over the next month, I helped her to open up and to listen to other people,

even if she didn't agree with them. She has definitely grown and matured since then. (f/gr/1/b/y)

All respondents believed that in one way or another they helped first-year students to succeed. " I think I definitely helped them to succeed. I was there to give them advice during that very trying first year of college" (f/gr/1/b/y). Another claimed, "I was there for them when they needed help: whether it was grades, school, classes, professors, family problems, dating problems, or death" (f/j/1/c/n). In general, peer leaders from Blue University believed that they were a major force in making the transition into college easier for their students, "I am certain I contributed to the transition of my students from high school to college" (f/gr/1/c/y). They gave numerous and varied reasons of how they believed they were able to accomplish this.

Seventeen peer leaders (47%) believed that their students were able to learn from them and from their freshman experiences. One respondent said, "I think that I was able to set them on a good path to success. I shared my experiences with them and truly believed that they took my words to heart" (f/sr/1/c/n). Another added, "I think I offered them the guidance and insight they needed to

successfully complete their first-year college experience. I wish someone would have told me the things I shared with them" (f/sr/1/c/y). Yet another expressed,

I think I opened their eyes to a lot of different things. I tried to warn them about things I had experienced at their age: drinking, sexuality, drugs, parties, etc. I tried not to be generic, so I think the reality of me talking to them in class and opening up an arena of ideas helped them make good decisions.

(f/gr/2/b/n)

Thirteen students (36%) felt that they gave their students a good understanding of college life. As one explained, "many of my students had the same major as myself, so I was able to advise them," said one

(f/sr/1/c/n). And another,

I told them about how important getting involved with the school's community was and how to balance school and social life, which is always hard. It seemed to work because they became more comfortable with Blue, they began to get involved and really started enjoying college life. (f/sr/1/b/n)

Another student expressed her confidence that she did help her students in this way, "Many of my students came out of

the class with a lot to show for (it), joining clubs/ organizations, as well as becoming involved in community programs. Sounds like a success to me!!" (m/sr/1/c/y)

Nine peer leaders also gave some very specific ways of how they helped their students in relation to time and scheduling,

I assigned my students a four-year plan in which they created their dream resume and planned every semester's coursework through graduation. I showed them a diagram and a calendar that I used to help me manage my time. This calendar had the dates of my exams, meetings and other important dates. I also told them to communicate and form a bond with an upperclassman in their college, so that this upperclassman will be able to tell them which professors to take and which courses are easier than others. (f/sr/1/c/n)

One peer leader shared a very poignant story regarding the events of September 11, 2001, and how she helped her students cope with those events.

September 11th occurred during my semester as a peer leader. It provided the perfect example of something unforeseen and disturbing that affected everyone. We discussed not only the event itself but also coping

skills for other unexpected trials one may undoubtedly face throughout their life. (f/sr/1/b/y)

Importance and Prestige of the Position

The data suggest that Blue's peer leaders perceived that being a peer leader was an important and prestigious position. They were told and believed that they had been chosen because they exemplified what the university considered to be role models of successful students, and that in the role of peer leaders, they were going to affect the lives of freshmen students. Blue University peer leaders begin their role with the perception that they were chosen because they are special and because they possess qualities important to the development of others. Institutional publications relating to peer leader recruitment, application and training promote and reinforce this notion. The motto: *Make a difference! Get involved! Become a Peer Leader!* is everywhere in Blue's peer leader recruitment brochure and clearly suggests that the position is a prestigious one.

One of the program directors also affirmed the importance and prestige of the position. "Becoming a peer leader is recognition of their (the peer leaders) success as a person and student." Moreover, from the way in which

the peer leaders spoke about the experience, it is clear that they received the message of the importance and prestigious nature of the position. "I was so honored to be selected as a peer leader and so enthusiastic about the opportunity that I believe I exuded a lot of positive energy to the group of students with whom I worked," (f/sr/1/c/y) explained one respondent.

Given their perceptions of the position, it was not surprising that the respondents were comfortable in enumerating the qualities that they possessed that were assets to becoming peer leaders for freshmen. As one peer leader explained, "I believe the qualities I possessed that were assets to being a peer leader include being organized, committed, flexible, open-minded, honest, and encouraging" (f/sr/1/c/n). Although these "qualities" covered wide and varied terms, they echoed the theme that peer leaders needed a wide array of skills for the position. As may be seen in Table 4.2., these "qualities," ranged from being a listener to being someone who likes challenges.

Table 4.2

"Qualities" Blue's peer leaders claimed to possess ranked by the number of respondents identifying the quality, and compared with the number of respondents who listed each "quality" in their definition of a peer leader

<i>"Quality" they believed they possessed</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Definition of a Peer Leader</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Listener	13	Positive role model	16
Outgoing	13	Helps with transition	15
Compassionate	12	Leader to younger students	14
Caring	11	Dedicated	14
Dedicated	11	Liaison between Students and Teacher	11
Responsible	11	Transmit information and experiences	11
Communicator	10	Mentor	10
Helper	10	Someone who cares	10
Knowledgeable about campus	9	A Knowledgeable person	10
Honest	8	Has integrity	9
Transparent	8	Accessible	8
Open-minded	8	Can relate to freshmen	7
Leadership experience	7	Successful student	7
Successful student	7	Advisor	7
Organized	7	Guide	7
Problem solver	6	Self motivated	6
Confident	5	Self confident	6
Desire to meet new people	4	Can manage time	5
Patient	4	Well-rounded	5
Easy to talk to	4	Positive	5
Determined	4	Fair	5
optimistic	4	Open-minded	5
Sense of humor	3	Enthusiastic	4
Prioritizes	3	Desire to learn from others	4
Driven	2	Valuable resource	3
Learner	2	Fun	3
creative	2	Passionate	2
Goal oriented	2	Supporter	1
Well-traveled	1		
Likes challenges	1		
Involved in community	1		

Interestingly, most of these "qualities" were also mentioned in the peer leaders' definitions of what it means to be a peer leader. This overlapping lends more support for the notion of importance and prestige since these peer leaders believed that not only were these qualities important, but that they possessed them and would not have been chosen for the role if they did not. Moreover, that these skills were important, even critical ones in the lives of first-year students. In defining the role of peer leader, peer leaders at Blue University used at least 28 broad positive descriptors.

Influence of their Peer Leaders

The data suggest that the majority of Blue University's peer leaders were positively impacted by their own peer leader which, in turn, led them to want to become peer leaders. Twenty-one (58%) of the peer leaders had a peer leader in a freshman seminar class when they were freshmen, and 30 of the 36 (83%) learned about their institution's peer leader program from a peer leader, either when they were in such seminars or from peer leaders outside the classroom. Positive interactions and experiences with peer leaders inspired them to want to become involved in the peer leader program. "I had such a

wonderful experience in my freshman seminar class with my peer leader...my peer leader helped me get involved and learn about the University," said one (f/gr/1/b/y). "I wanted to impact freshmen as my peer leader impacted me. I wanted to give back to the university," reported another (f/gr/1/c/y). Similarly, while current peer leaders gave a variety of reasons for becoming peer leaders, almost all indicated that they had enjoyed having a peer leader. Thirteen of the 16 females who had had a peer leader when they were freshmen stated explicitly that the main reason for wanting to become a peer leader was the positive influence their peer leader had on them. As one described it, "As a freshman, the peer leader in my freshman seminar class was an outstanding mentor. She made such an impact on me that I knew one day I would try to be a peer leader, too." (f/sr/1/c/y)

Interestingly enough, while all of the 5 males who participated in the survey had had a peer leader during their freshman year at Blue University, only one stated specifically that he was influenced by his peer leader to become a peer leader. The other four cited reasons like: "I wanted to help entering students get off on the right foot in college," (m/sr/1/b/y) and "I wanted a new challenge"

(m/gr/1/b/y). One was just pragmatic about his reason, "I just wanted the experience. I'm in the MT Education program and it was a good experience to have going into that program." (m/gr/1/b/y)

The Desire to Be Liked

A theme that emerged strongly from the data was the peer leaders' desire to be liked by their students. In one way or another, all the respondents said that it was important to them that their students like them. One student explained, "Absolutely! I don't see how they could have gotten anything out of the class if they didn't like me or accept me. Plus, I would have had a hard time putting it out of my mind; not being liked" (f/gr/1/c/y). Moreover, they were greatly disturbed when they felt that a student did not like them. "Many students were so nice to me. One student was not. She made me feel like a failure" (f/gr/1/c/n) said one. Another offered, "There were students that I didn't bond with and that really bothered me. I wanted to connect with everyone." (f/sr/1/b/n)

Blue's peer leaders believed if they were to be successful in their work, then they had to be "liked" by their students. As one peer leader explained, "If your students do not like you or accept you, they will usually

not take your advice, it (being liked) is very important. They will take you more seriously" (f/gr/1/c/y). Another explained, "I feel that in order to be a legitimate source of information they (the students) first had to accept and like me" (m/sr/1/b/y). Another put it more bluntly, "If your students are not going to like you (or listen to you), then you are wasting your time" (f/gr/1/c/y). They also tied the desire to be liked to educational outcomes they saw as important to helping students. "I wanted them to like me so they would feel comfortable coming to me if they needed something, which they did," shared one (f/sr/1/c/n). Another revealed, "I think any teacher wants their students to accept them as it makes the learning process more appealing to the student and teaching more enjoyable" (f/gr/1/b/n).

There were at least 13 respondents (36%) who equated "like" with "respect," and even suggested that the two ideals were dependent on one other. "If my students were going to respect me, then I felt like it was very important for them to like me," stated one (f/gr/1/c/y). Yet another explained, "if your students do not like you or accept you, they will not respect you" (m/sr/1/b/n).

The notion that Blue's peer leaders wanted to be liked by their students, clearly emerged in the data. Moreover, they saw it as necessary to the success of being a peer leader.

Love and Loyalty For Blue University

From the data it was evident that the peer leaders at Blue University felt a strong, deep sense of loyalty and connection to their university and wanted to share this with their students. "I wanted to give back to Blue and I wanted to help freshmen get involved and active in the Blue University community," said one peer leader (f/gr/1/c/y). Another claimed, "I love Blue and my experiences there and I wanted to share my excitement, enthusiasm and love for Blue with other freshmen and to help their transition into college...." (f/j/1/c/n)

This notion of love and loyalty was characteristic of all of the respondents and emerged in responses to the questionnaire and in the interviews. Speaking about the fervent institutional loyalty of peer leaders, one of the program directors explained that not only is Blue University the flagship institution of a small southern state in the heart of the Bible belt, but that there is

only one other public university in the state.

"Patriotism toward Blue University runs high!"

A sense of this strong love for the institution invariably emerged as peer leaders talked about the experience, and was even one of the reasons students gave for wanting to be peer leaders. "I loved Blue and wanted to share that with the freshmen," shared one (f/sr/2/c/y), and at least 16 (44%) said that they were so impacted by Blue University when they were freshmen they wanted to make sure that incoming freshmen "got what they got." As one peer leader noted, "I wanted to share my experiences and my love for the university with a classroom full of new students." (f/sr/1/c/y)

This loyalty appears to be nurtured by widespread institutional school pride as well as the selection process used for peer leaders. In the main foyer of the building that houses the peer leader program hangs a large antique painting of the football team's mascot, a type of domestic bird, and the University's "Creed," which is also strategically placed in the freshman seminar handbook, university catalog, and on the walls of offices around the campus. All Blue university students, including peer leaders, are expected to commit to this "Creed" (see

Appendix F). According to one peer leader, the Blue "Creed" is perceived as a "social honor code," similar to an academic honor code, but instead of focusing on in-class behavior between instructor and student, it addresses out-of-class behaviors between students. One of the program directors explained that the university likes to call the "Creed" a "teaching tool," and faculty and staff are encouraged to use it to "help students assert their rights and the respect they deserve as students and to understand the obligations that come with being a member of the Blue Community." According to one peer leader, "the Blue Creed is something that we all share...not only does it unify us as a student body, but it connects us to our university."

In promotional materials that advertise the peer leader program, three of the selection criteria for becoming peer leaders are:

- Enthusiasm for the university, its students, staff, faculty, academic, and co-curricular life
- Commitment to encourage students to achieve the ideals presented in *The "Blue" Creed*
- Interest in performing an important Blue University service and working as a team member with an instructor

Applicants to the peer leader program demonstrate the degree to which they meet these criteria in the essays they submit with their application and in their interviews.

Clearly, a premium is placed on love and loyalty to the institution in the selection process, so it is not surprising that it is a major theme emerging from the responses of the peer leaders. Further, this love and loyalty to Blue University is nurtured by the university's strong emphasis on service to others. Students at Blue University are introduced to the concept of service in their freshman year and one of the common course requirements of Blue University's freshman seminar course is community service/service learning experiences.

Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles

Blue University's peer leaders experienced obstacles during their experience as peer leaders, yet none of them quit or even thought about quitting. Rather, they perceived these obstacles as challenges to be worked through and overcome, problems to be solved, rather than insurmountable barriers, and problems that were amenable to solving through perseverance and their own efforts. Although six students could not recall experiencing any obstacles, the other 30 (83%) identified personal and/or institutional

challenges they encountered during their tenure as peer leaders and spoke about the part they played in the experience. The most frequently cited "hurdles" revolved around: managing their time, dealing with opposing views with their co-teacher, and knowing how to keep boundaries between the peer role and the role of model/teacher.

Most peer leaders reported time and time management as a major challenge. Apart from their peer leading duties, Blue's peer leaders juggled many different roles. They participated in organizations/activities, three on average, in addition to the peer leader program and their own studies. As can be seen in the breakdown of the types of organizations in which Blue University peer leaders participated (see Appendix G), they were very involved students who participated in a wide range of activities. Nevertheless, over half of them maintained a grade point average of more than 3.5. "Taking 18 credits a semester, balancing volunteer hours, senior seminar project, job search, lesson plans, etcetera, was hard to get used to," said one student (f/gr/1/b/y). But, she continued, "I did and managed to get my best G.P.A of my college career" (f/j/1/c/n). The resolve to overcome the challenge of

juggling several roles was expressed by another peer leader:

One personal hurdle that sticks out the most would have to be my time. I was a full time student and I also worked full time. But I tried to make the best out of the time I had. I actually worked on campus so I tried to encourage students to come to my job to say hello and if they needed to talk, which they did.

(f/sr/1/b/n).

At least four students (11%) spoke of the challenge of trying to adjust to the fact that their professors' ideas for running the class did not mesh with their own.

"Sometimes I didn't like the way the teacher taught or I found her lesson plans to be pointless" (f/gr/2/b/n).

However, these students worked to overcome this hurdle by dealing directly with the situation. Said one, "I sat down and had a talk with my professor and we straightened everything out" (f/gr/1/b/y).

Other peer leaders felt that they were not participating enough in the classroom. One peer leader explained that before the situation "got out-of-hand," she decided to address this issue with her professor. "My professor and I worked together, meeting often, to keep

each other on track and I just tried to be as creative as possible with the time I was given" (f/sr/1/c/n). Another explained, "I spoke with my professor and as the semester went on I got more and more time with the class; I even got to lead the class" (f/gr/2/b/y).

Perhaps the biggest obstacle peer leaders had to overcome revolved around issues associated with juggling a role that required one to be a friend and an instructor at the same time. Fourteen students (39%) identified this as a major hurdle and several others alluded to it. As one student explained, "The only personal hurdle I experienced was knowing where to draw the line between friend and peer leader, as I always wanted to be the friend" (f/grr/1/b/n). Another admitted, "I basically had to learn on my own where to draw that line. There were times when it was harder than others, but I finally learned through experience that sometimes you just have to be tougher" (m/s/2/b/n). Another confessed,

Since I was their age they didn't want to see me as a leader, but only as a friend. However, while I was able to have fun and be friends with them, I was also able to get serious with them when it was time to do

so. I had to sit down and discuss the situation with them. They were very understanding. (f/gr/1/b/y)

Interestingly, 11 of the 14 peer leaders who identified juggling the roles of friend and person of authority to be a major source of tension belonged to a Greek organization (fraternity or sorority) on campus.

I was very involved with Greek life. On one side, I felt uncomfortable because some of my students went through Rush and were cut. On the other side, I would often see my students at parties. I felt as though I was setting a bad example if they saw me out late.

(f/sr/1/c/y)

Despite the nature of the challenges that Blue's peer leaders faced, they were committed to their role as peer leaders and to meeting and overcoming the challenges. Indeed, all of them indicated they would do it again.

Impact on Peer Leader Development

Of the 36 peer leaders at Blue University, 30 (83%) perceived that being a peer leader had changed them significantly. One peer leader explained, "I am more assertive, confident, direct, patient, and sensitive" (f/gr/1/c/y). Another proclaimed, "It helped me understand people better. It has made me a better person and I am more

patient and open to change" (f/sr/1/c/y). The reported changes occurred in four areas: acquiring a stronger sense of self, becoming more open-minded, sharpening career choices and developing personal skills.

Fourteen peer leaders (39%) claimed that the experience of peer leading helped them develop a stronger sense of themselves and of their ability to affect others through their own efforts. As one put it,

It has definitely changed me as a person. I am more comfortable with myself and of my abilities in a leadership position. This experience will definitely benefit me for the rest of my life." (f/gr/1/c/y)

"Being a peer leader has made me a better person overall. I now know that I can make a difference in someone's life and help them to succeed," said another (f/sr/1/c/n).

A total of 32 of the 36 students claimed that they had become more open-minded and sensitive from their peer leading experiences. And 8 suggested that they gained a new respect for other cultures through their experience as a peer leader. "Peer leading has allowed me to truly see the vast variety of people/students in our world," offered one (f/gr/1/c/n). Another stated, "Everyone learns and thinks in different ways; that's such a wonderful knowledge to

have, considering my area of concentration: counseling. It helped me to be a little more open-minded" (f/s/2/c/y).

Not only did the peer leading experience help peer leaders acquire a stronger sense of self, but 13 peer leaders said that the experience had made them realize that they enjoyed teaching and wanted to do something similar one day. As one put it, "The peer leader program helped to finalize my decision of being a teacher and I am thankful I had this opportunity" (f/srr/1/c/n). Another reflected that the experience was such a positive one for her she wanted to "repeat the experience, relay the experiences to others and teach them (the students) about their options" (f/gr/1/b/n). Four peer leaders admitted that one of the reasons why they had become a peer leader was "to test out whether teaching was for me," (f/sr/2/c/n) and that the experience had helped them to decide that it was. Yet, another stated: "I ultimately want to teach in a college environment. Therefore I felt that the peer leader experience gave me hands on training in dealing with college students" (m/sr/1/a/y).

The peer leading experience also served as a catalyst for changing the career choices of six peer leaders. "I realized that I truly enjoyed teaching and mentoring. These

are things that I'd like to incorporate in my future career, so I changed my major" (f/gr/2/b/n). Another confirmed that being a peer leader had changed her because she now looked at teaching in a new light. "I highly respect teachers for their dedication and patience and their ability to mold students. I now want to do some type of teaching; that is the career I want to pursue in the future" (f/sr/1/c/n).

At least 12 peers leaders said that their main reason for becoming a peer leader was because they thought it would serve as a valuable experience for a future high school teacher. Not surprisingly, these peer leaders felt that they had acquired and perfected skills required for the teaching profession. As one suggested, "I learned how to plan a syllabus, teach lessons and relate to students" (f/sr/1/c/n).

Nearly 75% (n = 26) of the respondents claimed that the experience enhanced their leadership abilities. "This experience taught me a lot about leadership. I learned a lot of dos and don'ts!" (f/gr/1/c/n). The same percent perceived that their communication skills had been enhanced and that they could now express ideas more clearly and confidently. "It helped me with personal skills such as

talking in public, leading a group and initiating a discussion. It helped me know how to work with people of different backgrounds" (f/sr/1/c/n). Twelve peer leaders also said that being a peer leader helped them to reevaluate and enhance their social skills. "It's made me a better listener even if that means I have to approach a student who I know needs something but doesn't want to ask" (f/sr/1/c/n). Another claimed, "This experience will definitely benefit me for the rest of my life. It made me more aware of the world around me and how I can affect it and how easy it is to help others" (f/gr/1/b/n).

During follow-up interviews with peer leaders at Blue University, the consensus among the peer leaders was that in the position of mentor/role model, one tried to better him/herself and to live up to higher standards so as to set the best possible example, and in so doing, they had learned a lot about themselves and were able to grow as individuals. "It has definitely changed me. I am more comfortable with myself and of my abilities in a leadership position" (f/gr/1/c/y).

One student seemed to capture the effect of the experience of being a peer leader at Blue University. "I think I am a better person and professional now; and yes, I

feel like I made a difference at my university and in
the lives of my peers" (f/sr/1/c/n).

YELLOW UNIVERSITY

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars in three different contexts: Blue University, Yellow University and Pink State University. The methods used to collect data involved a questionnaire, with open-ended questions, on-site interviews with selected peer leaders and program directors at each site, institutional documents about the peer leadership program, and researcher field notes about each site. Data were collected about the peer leaders' experiences at Yellow University from 28 peer leader questionnaires, 5 interviews with peer leaders, 2 interviews with program directors, and institutional publications and field notes collected during a two-day visit to the campus. The data were analyzed inductively to derive the themes that emerged from and across the sources of data that characterized the experiences of peer leaders at Yellow University.

This chapter provides a description of Yellow University and of the experiences of peer leaders at Yellow University. The first part of the chapter includes a general description of Yellow University, its freshman

seminar program and the peer leader component of the program. Names have been withheld to insure confidentiality. The second part of the chapter focuses on the experiences of the peer leaders and the themes emerging from the data that characterized those experiences.

Portrait of Yellow University

Founded in 1855, Yellow University has grown to become one of the state's largest institutions of higher learning. Located in the northeastern part of the United States, this institution has continued to preserve its significant role in the training of teachers while evolving as a comprehensive institution offering 45 undergraduate and 26 graduate degree programs and serving some 12,000 students, of which just 1,200 are residential students. The present campus spreads across 150 acres of a low-lying, well manicured landscape. Although located on the outskirts of a small suburban community, Yellow University serves a broad area of its state and is located within walking distance from a transit system, making it easily accessible for commuter students. New student recruitment materials for Yellow University boast that this metropolitan, comprehensive, teaching university supports a student-centered learning environment and maintains a commitment to

excellence and equity in enrollment, instruction and administration.

Freshman Seminar Program

According to the school's academic catalog, Yellow University is a campus dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in higher education by supporting a "student-centered learning environment that nurtures the development of the whole student for rewarding careers, lifelong learning and fulfilling lives in a global society." This goal is reflected in the school's freshman seminar, a mandatory one hour, credit bearing course required of all freshman. The course serves as an introduction to university life by introducing students to academic and support services, study and time management skills, and involvement in campus activities. In addition, students do a research paper on careers and participate in various activities to help with their transition to the university. Today, Yellow's freshman seminar course serves as the centerpiece for Yellow University's First Year Center which began in 1985.

Yellow's freshman year experience program was initiated by a group of faculty in 1985. According to a former director of Yellow University's freshman seminar,

"It started as a course initially and it may have even been grant funded... There was a lot of initiative on campus towards assessment and retention of students and a lot of really creative energy." This small network of faculty guided the development of the freshman seminar course, and around the same time, work started on the development of a Freshman Center. In its initial years, the Center was specifically geared toward first-time freshmen and it served as the "home" for these students and the freshman seminar course. In response to the changing demographic profile of entering students, the Center was renamed Center for New Students in 1995, to incorporate freshmen, transfer and adult new students.

The Center is overseen by a Center director (who also supervises the peer leadership program) and a faculty director who supervises the freshman seminar course. "They always worked kind of hand in hand," explained the former director. Figure 5a shows the connection between The Center for New Students and the Peer leadership and Freshman Seminar course components.

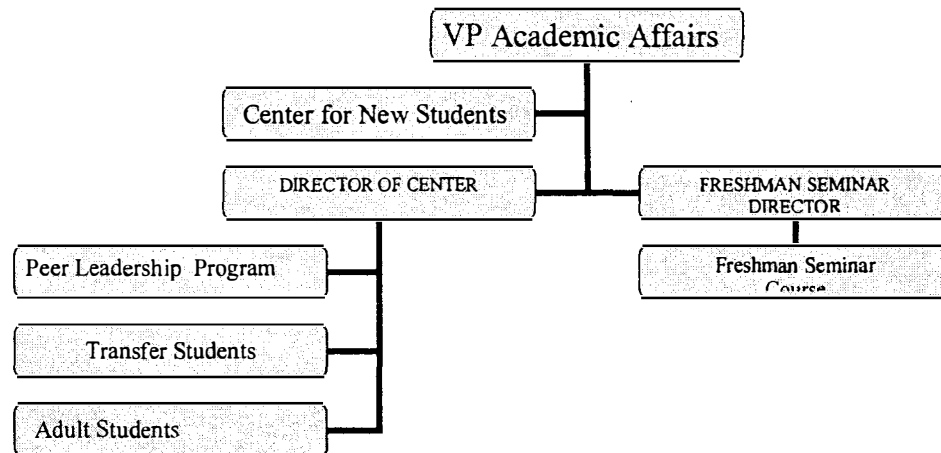


Figure 5a. Connection between Center for New Students and the Peer Leadership and Freshman Seminar course components at Yellow University

Today, the Center for New Students is housed under Academic Affairs and is administratively supervised by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Currently, there are approximately 65 sections of Yellow's freshman seminar course each year. The one-hour seminar is taught by full-time faculty and a few administrators and co-taught by peer leaders. All participating faculty volunteer to teach the course as an overload and both faculty and administrators who teach the course receive a stipend for attending a freshman seminar training workshop. Peer leaders are required to attend the training workshop. However, since

they perform office duties in the Center for New Students, they are paid for their work in the Center.

Nearly 120 faculty, administrators, and peer leaders attended the most recent two-day training program in May at the end of the school year. This is one of three training sessions held throughout the academic year. "One of the things we do at this training is give the instructors and peers an opportunity to get to know each other," said the director of Yellow's Center for New Students. In addition, participants review the course goals, lecture topics and course materials.

At this initial training workshop, the peers and instructors receive instruction regarding the mission and objectives of the course. They discuss and make decisions about issues such as: how to address each other in the classroom, where the peer will sit in the classroom, when they will meet, and the logistics of running the class together. During this training, peer leaders also sign a contract with their instructor partner which basically outlines each individual's responsibilities. As one peer leader characterized it, "This helps to reduce possible conflicts and unrealistic expectations." Signing of a contract also lends an air of professionalism to the

proceedings and conveys a sense of the importance of peer leaders to the process of helping freshmen succeed. As the freshman seminar faculty director explained, training is seen as an important rite of passage for the peer leaders in which they learn they are playing a vital role in educating their peers.

Following the initial training workshop, instructors of the course are asked to attend two more meetings: one just prior to the arrival of new students where they receive course materials and "last minute" instructions, and one in the middle of the semester, held on campus in an auditorium in a question and answer session. A peer leader manual created by the program directors and former peer leaders serves as a resource for ongoing training. This is distributed at the May training session. The manual contains descriptions of the peer leaders' responsibilities, what the directors expect from peer leaders, what they can expect from the directors, resources, teaching tips, and early warning procedures.

TIME magazine recently listed Yellow University among its *16 Colleges of the Year* on the basis of its Freshman Seminar Program. The program directors are extremely proud of this recognition and use it to muster further support

from the administration for the program. It is interesting to note that during the initial training workshop, Yellow's provost/vice president for academic affairs stated, "No matter where my work takes me, invariably, someone mentions Yellow's Freshman Seminar Program. It is a nationally recognized program, and we need to understand the importance of that." The program director added that "Students love helping other students and that is one of the biggest success stories of the program,"

Peer Leader Program

Impressed by the positive impact peers were having on peers through intentional classroom interaction at other institutions, peer leaders were added to the freshman seminar course less than 2 years after the course was begun. The directors at Yellow University recommended the addition of a peer leader component and the administration quickly approved the recommendation.

The peer leader component of the course has become an essential ingredient of the program, and it seeks to recruit dedicated student leaders who are well respected on campus and academically successful. To be eligible for a Peer Leader position, applicants must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and be an undergraduate, second semester freshman,

sophomore, junior or senior. Recruiting advertisements are placed in the school's newspaper beginning in the early spring, and applicants are then subjected to a rigorous screening process. As part of the application process, aspiring peer leaders submit a resume that includes their areas of involvement, and two essays, one on their experience as a freshman and the other on how they perceive they can help freshman students succeed. Each applicant has a personal interview with one of the program directors and must submit two faculty recommendations.

Approximately 75 applicants vie for the 60 peer leading spots. The fact that peer leaders cannot hold any other job on campus might account for the low number of applicants, explained one of the program directors. According to another, "We look for students who show a strong level of involvement, are not on academic probation and have good references." Students must have a minimum grade point average of 3.0 and demonstrate leadership in other areas of University life, (e.g., student government, fraternity and sorority councils, community service groups, residence life, honor societies, social awareness organizations).

In addition to serving as a co-instructor, Yellow's peer leaders spend a minimum of 10 hours per week working in the Center for New Students. This work, for which they are paid, allows time to prepare for their freshman seminar class, assist first-time students who stop for assistance in the Center, and schedule meetings with their students. Speaking about this work, one peer leader explained:

As a college student it is very difficult to work outside of campus because your schedule is so limited and your schedule changes from day to day. The best thing for you to do is to find work on campus and as long as you are working on campus why not do something that could help people and that could make a difference.

Each peer leader is required to turn in a log book bi-weekly in order to be paid. "The only time we would ever withhold pay from them is if they don't submit the log book to me," explained one of the program directors. In the log book, peer leaders outline the contents of the class, preparation meetings they have had with their instructor, what they have actually covered in their freshman seminar class and each of their meetings with students, and whether the meetings were formally scheduled or someone just

stopped in to see them. Maintaining a log book is seen as a form of accountability, but it is also intended as a reminder to the peer leaders that that they are serving in a professional capacity. This notion of peer leaders as professionals, i.e., (as an employee who serves the public), is a central tenet of the program. Speaking about this one of the program directors explained, "I think they learn how to work. They have always been students and maybe they have worked in retail, but they have never really worked in a business atmosphere. I remind them that we are conducting the business of the office and we want a professional." This approach is not without its drawbacks. Program directors admitted that when you treat peer leaders as professionals, the challenge is that as they begin to see themselves as professionals. One of the program directors explained that while this is a "good thing", peer leaders only get "pieces of the puzzle," not the big picture, and sometimes they think "they can know it all."

Of the 28 peer leaders who responded to the questionnaire from Yellow University, 23 were female and 5 were male. These students had served an average of two semesters as a peer leader and all 28 had a peer leader when they were freshmen. While 4 respondents had a grade

point average (GPA) that was less than 3.0, 11 reported a GPA of more than 3.0, and the GPA of 12 peer leaders was more than 3.5. Six peer leaders were sophomores, 10 were juniors and 12 were seniors.

The responses of the peer leaders are coded by gender, classification, number of semesters they have served as a peer leader, grade point average (G.P.A) and whether they had a peer leader as a freshman student. The codes will appear after each student quotation. The categories with the codes and their meanings are in Table 5.1.

Characteristics of the Experience

Data were derived from: questionnaires, on-site interviews with selected peer leaders, the three program directors, institutional publications about the peer leadership program and researcher field notes taken during an on campus visit.

Six themes emerged from the data. The experience of peer leaders at Yellow University was characterized by: (1) Positive Interactions with Students; (2) Helped their Students Succeed; (3) the Importance and Prestige of the Position; (4) a Desire to be liked; (5) Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles, and (6) Impact on (their) Peer Leader Development.

Table 5.1.***Demographic information on Yellow University's peer leaders***

<i>Category</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Gender	m	Male
	f	Female
Classification	s	Sophomore
	j	Junior
	sr	Senior
	gr	Graduate
Semester(s) Served	1	one semester
	2	two semesters
	3	three semesters
	4	four semesters
G.P.A	a	less than 3.0
	b	between 3.0 and 3.5
	c	over 3.5
Had a Peer Leader	y	Yes
	n	No

Positive Interactions with Students

Yellow's peer leaders were united in their belief that positive interactions were essential to their success as peer leaders.

Interaction is really essential to the class and for the class to really work well; the students and the peer leader have to make that environment as positive as possible. I think the more interaction there is,

the more they learn. Positive interaction is really important. (m/s/3/c/y)

Their belief found realization in their experiences and all 28 respondents reported that their experiences with students were highly positive. Further, they also perceived that through their positive interactions with students they were having a strong, positive impact on students and forming relationships of trust and respect. As one peer leader explained:

I personally spent time in dorms where my students lived and I told stories of living there and how to study, manage time, etc. I allowed them to ask questions about anything in general. After our last class many came back to give me update(s) that my interactions with them positively impacted them.

(m/sr/3/b/y)

Another confirmed, "I helped my students get involved on campus and I helped them get to know a lot of people both socially and for their academic needs" (f/sr/4/a/y).

Yellow's peer leaders are required to have one-on-one meetings with each student in the class. Thirteen peer leaders identified these meetings as a key to the success of the relationships that were formed:

From the meeting, I got to know each person and I understood their personality better. I think that a bond was formed where they trusted me and they understood what I was there for and what my job was. You also bond with your students and they bond with you because they understand that you have been through the same first-year stuff. (f/j/2/b/y)

At least 11 respondents likened the relationship to a friendship, one based on trust and respect. "When you have a friend, you respect your friend. In the meetings the trust forms a bond of friendship and respect," said one (f/sr/4/b/y). Another peer leader said:

In a friendship there is no bond without trust. I think it is important because you want to make sure that they know that you are there for them as a friend and that they can trust you. It is just as important that during those meetings you talk to them and get them to talk to you. I think once you form a bond with somebody and you have respect for them, you have respect for their opinions too. (f/j/3/c/y)

Twelve respondents also spoke about "respect" and how it factored into their interactions with students. "It was very open. We went back and forth regarding matters of

school and over personal life. We joked around with each other, but never offended one another" (m/j/3/c/y). Another revealed,

My relationship with my students was one of mutual respect. I learned to treat them with the respect they deserve as young adults in order to receive the respect I want. I can't complain thus far, everything has worked out fine for me. We interact great!

(f/s/2/c/y)

The peer leaders' perceptions that they had positive interactions with their students were also based on the fact that their relationships with their students continued even after the freshman seminar class was over. At least 11 (about 1/3) of the respondents gave examples of this. Said one:

Even though our class is over they still come to me for help. They told me things that they would definitely not tell others and I kept it between us. A few students still email me with any questions that they have, or ask me when they see me. (f/j/4/b/y)

Another explained:

I still speak to many of my students. My interactions with my students must have been positive, which means

a lot to me because they still respect my opinion. I always enjoy students coming up to me and telling me how much I had helped them. (f/sr/4/c/y)

Reading the responses of Yellow's peer leaders about their experiences as peer leaders leaves little doubt that they perceived their experiences to be positive as a result of the positive interactions they had with their students.

Helped Their Students Succeed

In one way or another, all respondents from Yellow University believed that they had helped their first-year students to succeed. "I feel I helped them a lot. Many students were "lost" when they came to the university. I think I helped provide them with direction and lots of information which they carried on with them through college" (m/sr/2/c/y).

While 12 peer leaders believed that they helped their students succeed by serving as an example of what others can become, ("I was very involved on campus and worked hard and they saw that since I can do it, they can as well" {f/sr/4/a/y}), well over half of them believed that they helped these students just by "being there for them." As one expressed, "I was always there for them, phone, email, IM, meetings. I always told them to go for what they

believe in. I think I helped them a lot in their lives, personal as well as institutional" (f/j/2/b/y). Yet another expressed, "I believe that the way I helped was by being there for them through difficult and confusing times. And I used my own personal examples to let them know where I was coming from" (f/sr/1/b/n).

At least 11 peer leaders talked about their role as a role model and an encourager.

I gave them a lot of encouragement that they could succeed and made sure that I addressed their problems promptly. I had a girl who had a lot of personal problems and in a way I turned to be a role model for her and her life turned 360°. (f/sr/3/c/y)

Yet another revealed, "Some needed a steer in the proper direction and I felt for some I was their steering wheel. I gave them support and guidance; a friend to call on if they need me" (m/j/2/c/y).

It was clear that Yellow's peer leaders believed that they positively impacted freshmen and had reasons for believing that they did. "I had students come to me telling me how much they hate school, that I had been able to help, and nowadays I see them walking thru campus with a big smile in their faces" (f/sr/3/c/y).

The Importance and Prestige of the Position

Yellow's peer leaders perceived their role to be important and prestigious. All of the respondents were familiar with the program before becoming a peer leader and 22 said that they learned about Yellow's peer leader program on the very first day they arrived on campus, during new student orientation. Since peer leaders are given such high visibility on orientation day, it sends out a message that they must be important. "You find out about the peer program at orientation, on your first day...you are introduced to the peers" said one peer leader (f/sr/2/b/y). Another elaborated, "I think being a peer is not an opportunity everyone has a chance to have and it's an experience that is something so wonderful you can't help but feel privileged to do it" (f/s/2/b/y).

Beyond this, the peer leaders were highly conscious of the national recognition and acclaim the program enjoyed, making the position of peer leading prestigious. "I am fortunate to be a part of a program that has received national recognition. Faculty, new students, everyone holds the program in high regard" (f/sr/1/c/n). Another added, "you get benefits... like you get to register first, you get to move in a day earlier, you get to make a few connections

here and there..." (f/j/1/c/n). While the university sponsors several peer-related groups: resident assistants, ambassadors, etc., the role of peer leader in the freshman seminar has always been something "unique and special" according to the program directors.

Another reason Yellow's peer leaders perceived the position as important and prestigious was that they saw themselves as role models and as vital to linking the student, teacher and the university. As one explained, "I think a lot of incoming freshmen know all the work that peer liaisons do and I think they have high regard for us. People look up to peer leaders as role models. They know we are go-betweens" (m/j/1/b/y).

In defining the role of peer leaders, "liaison between the students and the teacher/university" was the most frequently cited definition. More than half of the respondents used the word "liaison" in their definition of peer leader. "We are go betweens-- between students and the school. Whatever the students need to get from this school they can come to us and we can help them get it" (m/sr/3/c/y). They also saw themselves as being a key to helping and guiding these students in their transition from high school life to college life. Fourteen peer leaders

used the term "guide" in their definition of a peer leader. "We were there for them (the freshman). We were the only ones there to guide new students to become more familiar with the university/college regarding majors, academic advisement, rules/ regulation and other useful resources" (m/sr/3/b/y).

Their sense that they played a critical, not just important role as peer leaders emerged from every description of the role. And one of the program director's added,

They (the peer leaders) act as a link by guiding; they definitely guide the student to get involved and to make the best that they can of their education, to take responsibility for their education and things of that nature. They are an invaluable resource.

(m/j/2/c/y)

The perception of importance and prestige appears to be reinforced by the professional climate which frames the experience. Peer leaders are referred to as professionals and are expected to act as professionals. "I remind them that we are conducting the business of the office and we want a professional," said one of the program directors. Another added that the physical location of the work

(Center for New Students) had a lot to do with the professionalism and importance that is associated with the role of peer leaders at Yellow University. "They (the peer leaders) are the only students on campus who have their own office space and a private kitchen area that they can use as a socializing area or for other purposes such as eating, studying or doing homework".

Given the perceptions that Yellow's peer leaders had of themselves and their position, they were not modest when describing the qualities they possessed which they believed served as assets to being a peer leader. Although these "qualities" covered wide and varied terms, they echoed the theme that the peer leaders needed a wide array of qualities which they possessed and that these skills were critical ones if one were to affect the lives of first-year students. As may be seen in Table 5.2., these "qualities," varied from listener to someone who likes challenges.

Desire to Be Liked

Peer leaders at Yellow University expressed a strong desire to be liked by their students. In one way or another, all of the respondents said that it was important

Table 5.2

"Qualities" Yellow's peer leaders claimed to possess ranked by the number of respondents identifying the quality

"Quality"		Number of Respondent s	"Quality"		Number of Respondents
1.	Leadership	19	10.	Open- minded	11
2.	Outgoing	18	11.	Honest	10
3.	Friendly	18	12.	Available	10
4.	Communication skills	16	13.	Motivator	10
5.	Relator	14	14.	Organized	9
6.	Responsible	13	15.	Respectful	9
7.	Caring	13	16.	Sense of Humor	6
8.	Knowledgeable about campus	12	17.	Creative	6
9.	Listener	12	18.	Involved	5

for their students to like them and saw it as necessary to their effectiveness as peer leaders. "It is important to me that my students like me. If you were not liked and accepted, you lose the link with your students. You can still do your job if this is lacking, but not to the same extent."

At least half of the respondents gave reasons why being liked by their students made the overall experience better. As one respondent put it, "Of course, no one likes to be rejected; I felt that if I was liked by my students, then it would make our relationship so much more open and better" (m/j/2/c/y). Yet another peer leader explained, "It was important that my students liked and accepted me because I wanted them to be able to confide in me in whatever issues they had" (f/s/1/b/y).

Nine of the respondents associated being liked with trust and acceptance. "I wanted my students to accept me, to feel that I had a purpose. If they didn't accept me then they felt that I could be of no use to them when in actuality I could help them" (f/s/2/c/y) remarked one student. Yet another explained, "I don't believe that I can help them if they don't relate to me! I have to gain their trust and acceptance to be effective" (f/sr/4/b/y). One peer leader pointedly tied the desire to be liked to being a successful leader.

A leader is a role model, which means, someone you would probably like to follow. So personally I think that you have to try your best for students to like you, because they would rather follow someone they

like/accept than someone they don't like/accept.

(f/sr/3/c/y)

While all of the respondents agreed that it was necessary to be liked by their students, three of them saw a distinction between being liked and being respected and preferred that their students extend the latter. "To an extent, I was more after respect from them than them liking me," (f/s/2/b/y) revealed one peer leader. Another expressed, "it was important that they showed respect, as it is important that you show respect to anyone. I personally didn't care if they liked me, but it was nice to know they did" (f/j/3/c/y).

Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles

Peer leaders at Yellow University experienced obstacles during their experience as a peer leader. These obstacles played a prominent role in the descriptions of their experiences. In the face of these obstacles, they remained committed to the experience and proved resilient in dealing with whatever hurdles and challenges they encountered. All 28 peer leaders identified some type of personal and/or institutional challenge they encountered during their tenure as a peer leader. The most often cited "hurdles" revolved around managing their time and dealing

with conflicts in the office or with their instructor.

Twenty-two peer leaders indicated that they struggled with time management issues; and 6 peer leaders spoke about the interpersonal conflicts they faced.

Yellow's peer leaders often found it hard to balance their time between helping others and helping themselves. As part of their work agreement, peer leaders were required to attend many campus events in addition to their hours in the Center and work in and for the Seminar. While attendance at these events promoted their visibility and made the campus community more aware of the peer leader program, it added to the peer leaders' workload. Moreover, in addition to their peer leading duties, Yellow's peer leaders juggled many different roles. They were students with academic obligations and they participated in, on average, two campus organizations besides the peer leader program. Appendix G provides a breakdown of the types of organizations in which Yellow University peer leaders participated. Further, 75% of the peer leaders had an average commute of at least 30 minutes to school each day.

In spite of all these calls on their time and energy, peer leaders remained actively involved on campus and 85%

of them maintained a grade point of average of 3.0 or above. One of the peer leaders explained:

As an English major, I always had reading and papers to do, and at times, it was hard to balance. Add to that, being on the school paper and fulfilling my duties in church, commuting, I often became stressed out. (f/j/4/b/y)

Their resolve to overcome the challenge of juggling roles and obligations was aptly described by another peer leader.

I learned time management skills, I learned to be more social, and I began to talk more. I grew as a person. I learned multi-tasking. I began to prioritize things in my life. I allowed myself to put my personal problems aside because there were people depending on me to do my best. I am a role model and must put my best face forward at all times. However, I was truthful with my students about having a bad day, etc. to let them know that I was still human. (f/j/4/b/y)

For six peer leaders, conflicts with peers, instructors and/or office staff were major hurdles they faced and overcame in their experience. "I had to deal with personal disagreements with co-workers in the Center and

learn to set boundaries with my students," (f/j/2/b/y) explained one student. Yet another revealed,

I did experience conflicts with the instructor I taught with last fall. I was expecting there to be a team effort; however she gave me way too much responsibility, including teaching the class by myself. I had to learn to become more organized with my papers and time and I learned to work. (f/j/2/c/y)

But it was their resolve at overcoming the hurdles that was so notable. "I worked at finding a happy medium when dealing with these situations and it worked!"

(f/2/j/b/y) reported one excitedly. Another revealed, "I did experience conflicts with the instructor I taught with last fall. I had to learn to practice and ask others for advice and simply take it easy ---breathing deeply"

(f/j/3/c/y/). One of these peer leaders suggested that these conflicts had made him have "more appreciation for teachers and professors because I now understand the difficulties and challenges of managing people"

(f/sr/4/b/y).

All of the peer leaders perceived that they had faced obstacles and had been successful in overcoming them. Yet, despite these obstacles, they all believed that they helped

some or all of their first-year students to succeed and none of the respondents expressed any regrets about becoming peer leaders.

Impact on Peer Leader Development

A strong theme that emerged from the data was the impact of the experience on the peer leaders and their development. Indeed, all of the peer leaders claimed that the experience had helped them in their development as persons. Besides gaining the satisfaction that comes from helping others, they reported that they had developed skills beneficial to the world of work and learned more about themselves.

Yellow's peer leaders were gratified by their experiences as peer leaders. At the beginning of the experience, 75% of them had cited "to make a difference" and over 65% cited "to help and assist freshman students adjust" as reasons for wanting to be peer leaders. After having been involved in the experience, all of them claimed that their experience had met their expectations and openly expressed their satisfaction with it. "So many of my students have come up to me and have thanked me. That in itself was something I would have never expected"

(f/j/2/b/y). Another proclaimed, "I helped students and it makes me feel so great!" (m/j/3/c/y)

Seeing students succeed helped to increase the confidence they felt in their ability as leaders,

I feel that I have made a difference in the lives of my peers, I believe I helped many of them to stay at (Yellow), because many came with the notion that they were going to leave after their first year. This made me feel more confident about being a leader.

9f/s/1/b/y)

Yet another expressed her satisfaction in this way.

One of my students was close to failing in half of her classes. I convinced her that she shouldn't give up.

I convinced her to start giving her all. She did, and pulled her Fs to Bs. I realized that I was a leader. I feel like a leader, someone who can make a difference in someone else's life. (f/sr/4/b/y)

While all of the respondents said that the experience helped them develop as a person, over two thirds of them claimed that they developed interpersonal skills as a result of the experience.

I became a person that people could talk to and not be shy ... I am much more comfortable speaking in front of

large groups and I am also much more likely to approach people I would not have before. (f/j/4/b/y)

Yet another confessed, "I am now better at communication, my people and public speaking skills improved and I feel like a leader since I am comfortable interacting with others" (f/j/3/c/y)

Half of the respondents said that the experience had made them much more "open-minded". "I work better with people now and having my own class helped me prepare for what it will possibly be like when I go out and teach after college ... I feel I am much more open minded"

(f/sr/4/b/y). Another peer leader confirmed that the experience allowed her "to get to know many cultures and break barriers in the cultural levels. I feel a bit more prepared now. Peer leading has inspired me to succeed. It has made me become more personable, more aware of things (m/j/2/b/y). "Yet another revealed, "It has also helped me stay focused. I've overcome the fear of public speaking. I've developed new skills. It has been a wonderful experience, and a very rewarding feeling."

Three-quarters of the peer leaders indicated that they had gained some type of skill through the experience that was transferable and marketable. One student claimed she

developed "many skills such as time management, problem solving, conflict resolution and interpersonal skills" (f/j/3/c/y). Another confessed, "My people skills are better. I listen a lot more now when people come to me for help" (f/sr/4/b/y). Yet another revealed, "I'm more organized and take dealing with personnel more seriously. If I'm going to be a doctor, learning to deal with others is a necessary skill to have" (m/sr/3/b/y).

One of the peer leaders captured the impact that the experience had on her development in this manner:

It has helped me. I think being a peer is not an opportunity everyone has a chance to have and the experience is something so wonderful you can't help but feel privileged to do it. It has helped me grow as a person. I have learned a lot about leadership. I have become much more social. I have met people from many different backgrounds. It gave me an opportunity to make a difference. (m/sr/4/c/y)

PINK STATE UNIVERSITY

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars by examining these experiences in three different contexts: Blue University, Yellow University and Pink State University. The methods used to collect data involved a questionnaire, with open-ended questions, on-site interviews with selected peer leaders and program directors at each site, institutional documents about the peer leadership program, and researcher field notes about each site. Data were collected about the peer leaders' experiences at Pink University from 19 peer leader questionnaires, 5 interviews with peer leaders, one interview with the program director, and institutional publications and field notes collected during a two-day visit to the campus. The data were analyzed inductively to derive the themes that emerged from and across the sources of data that characterized the experiences of peer leaders at Pink University.

This chapter provides a description of Pink University and of the experiences of peer leaders at Pink University.

The first part of the chapter includes a general description of Pink University, its freshman seminar program and the peer leader component of the program. Names have been withheld to insure confidentiality. The second part of the chapter focuses on the experiences of the peer leaders and the themes emerging from the data that characterized those experiences.

Portrait of Pink State University

Approaching the campus of Pink State University in the heart of the Ozark Mountains, it is difficult for one to imagine that this is the second largest university in the state. Despite the fact that this bustling campus is home to over 19,000 students, the campus is so compact that students can easily walk from one class to the next in just a few minutes. Surrounded by lush greenery, the institution can be traced back to 1905 when it was founded as a District Normal School. It became a State Teachers College in 1919 and later changed its name to Pink State University in 1972. Today, the institution is part of a three-campus university system, has students from every state in the U.S. and 80 other countries, and offers more than 150 undergraduate and 43 graduate academic programs. According to its catalog, the university seeks to provide

instructional, research, and service programs for the overall campus community.

Freshman Seminar Program

According to Pink's freshman seminar program director, Pink State University's freshman seminar, *Introduction to University Life* (IDS 110), began in the fall of 1994 as a one-credit hour, graded course. One year earlier, the institution had piloted 30 sections of a college survival seminar. "The first year it was a pass /fail course. However, after one semester, the instructors of the course decided that they didn't like it to be pass/fail; they wanted it changed to a graded course." As enrollment numbers at Pink State University grew, so did the number of freshman seminar offerings. The highest number was in the fall of 2002 with 115 sections. Today, each of the 100 plus sections of IDS 110 has a maximum of 25 students and is team-taught by faculty and staff, and co-taught by peer leaders.

According to the program's director, the goal of the freshman seminar (IDS 110) course is to "introduce students to the purpose of higher education, and to help them acquire academic skills, cultivate a positive attitude toward learning, explore career opportunities, clarify

personal values, develop critical thinking skills, and appreciate diversity". Pink State University's academic catalog course description for IDS 110 describes it best.

IDS 110: Introduction to University Life

designed to facilitate a successful university experience, this course introduces students to the purposes and processes of higher education. Emphasis is placed on the holistic development of the student. Required of freshmen.

A close look at the seminar syllabus reveals that the topics covered in the course include: academic planning, library orientation, value of college, study skills, test anxiety, career planning, health/wellness/safety, diversity, stress management, money management, campus and community involvement, speaking and writing, campus resources, critical thinking, understanding professors, relationships, group building, social skills, and values clarification.

Presently, approximately 2,700 students are enrolled in a section of Pink's freshman success course. The course is required of all first time, full-time freshmen students. Part-timers and students who are transferring with more than 21 credit hours are not required to take IDS 110. The

course is supervised by the Dean of University College for Continuous Orientation. Continuous Orientation is a department that reports to the Provost, and since its inception, Pink State's peer leader program has been directed by the Associate Dean of University College for Continuous Orientation.

In 1995 the governor of the state signed into law a Senate Bill which gave Pink State University a state-wide mission in public affairs. This mission was to produce citizens "of enhanced character, more sensitive to the needs of community, more competent and committed in their ability to contribute to society, and more civil in their habits of thought, speech and action," shared the program director. This public affairs theme is a university-wide undertaking. Signs, banners and wall collages creatively and forcefully depict this public affairs message and focus on five areas: professional education, health, business and economic development, creative arts, and science and the environment. The program director explained that by focusing on these broad areas, "the student is understood as having a life-long career as a citizen, for which distinct skills and moral commitments are necessary". She further added, "Pink State University considers skills and

moral commitments as complementary and seeks to build proficiency in each of them." She claimed this is done,

- By developing an increasing awareness of the public dimension of life.
- By producing a broad literacy in the primary public issues.
- Establishing a campus environment where the awareness of public questions is nurtured and their discussion is encouraged.
- Creating the capacity for and the interest in doing voluntary public work.
- Providing community service learning opportunities as a significant component of disciplinary instruction.

Recruitment materials link both the freshman seminar and peer leader programs to the public affairs theme by uniting students in support groups, motivating involvement in the campus community, providing large-group presentations on health and safety issues, and encouraging responsible citizenship.

Peer Leader Program

In the fall of 1995, the peer leader component of Pink State University's freshman seminar course was initiated. The goal was to engage a trained upper level student to be

teamed with an IDS 110 instructor in order to assist with class activities and teaching, develop positive relationships with freshmen, and serve as resources for campus activities and services. The program director explained that the peer leader is seen as a liaison between the freshman and the lead teacher. "They are closer in age to the freshmen so the freshmen can identify and feel more comfortable asking them questions." The program director is pleased with program. "Course evaluations have revealed that peer leaders had a significant impact on the way freshmen perceive the course because they helped interpret things for the lead teachers."

Recruitment materials show that the requirements for becoming a peer leader at Pink State University include

- 3.0 cumulative GPA
- Good interpersonal and communication skills
- Strong work ethic
- High standards of ethics and integrity
- Respect for the University and its students, faculty and staff
- Desire to serve others

In addition to standard recruitment strategies: flyers on bulletin boards and advertisements in the school's news

paper, potential peer leaders are usually nominated by IDS 110 instructors or by students. The program director elaborated that if students write her a letter on behalf of another student who is applying for a position as a peer leader, "there is a better chance that the student will become a peer leader." Likewise, a lead teacher can be nominated by a peer leader or a student. "There are three prongs here: the teacher, the peer leader, and the freshmen. The other two prongs can nominate the third prong and then they submit evidence and explain why they were significant." Individual interviews are conducted as part of the selection process. The program director conducts each interview:

Of course they have their questionnaire they fill out about why they want to be a peer leader and what they've done but some really good questions to ask are: "Why did you choose Pink?" or "Why did you choose this school?" I want to know what they think about this school because a peer leader has to be enthusiastic and positive about the school. Number two I ask them, now that you are here what do you like most about Pink. Then I find out if and how IDS 110 helped them and what they think about the course.

Once the peer leaders are chosen, the director of the program begins the task of matching and pairing peer leaders with faculty members who were invited and have agreed to teach a section of IDS 110. Only one-third of the freshman seminar sections have a peer leader. "At the best I've gotten up to 45%," says the program director. She explained that this low percentage is due in part to the fact that "university student ambassadors are paid for their services and peer leaders aren't." The program director explained how it works since there aren't enough peer leaders to go around. "When the teachers fill out their commitment form there is a place for them to indicate whether they want a peer leader or not and I keep a record of who has had a peer leader and who hasn't so the next year I try to help those who wanted a peer leader and didn't get one last year to get one this next year."

Once selected, Pink's peer leaders are required to complete a one-day training workshop, prior to the experience and to register for IDS 310, a course for peer leaders while they are serving as peer leaders. The one-day training is mandatory for both faculty and peer leaders. "The training workshop is held in May right before school lets out. Then we prepare some things in the summer for

them and then in August right before school starts we have a kick-off meeting," explained the program director. Moreover, the IDS 310 course for peer leaders was created to parallel the IDS 110 course and to serve as an arena for current peer leaders to receive specific curricula training for their role as a co-teacher of IDS 110. They are given ideas and assignments on how to achieve the course objectives, facilitate class discussions, present information, and help evaluate assignments.

Of the 19 students who responded to the questionnaire from Pink State University, 16 females and 3 males, 7 said they had a peer leader when they were freshmen and 12 did not. While only one respondent had a grade point average (GPA) that was less than 3.0, 3 peer leaders said that their GPA was more than 3.0 and the GPA of 15 peer leaders was more than 3.5. At the time that students completed the questionnaire, 7 held sophomore status, 7 were juniors and 5 were seniors.

The responses of peer leaders are coded by gender, classification, number of semesters they have served as a peer leader, grade point average (G.P.A) and whether they had a peer leader as a freshman student. The codes will

appear after each student quotation. The categories with the codes and their meanings are in Table 6.1.

Experiences of Peer Leaders at Pink State University

Data were derived from questionnaires, on-site interviews with selected peer leaders, the program's director, institutional publications about the peer leadership program and researcher field notes taken during an on-campus visit. Seven themes emerged from this data.

Table 6.1.

Demographic information on Pink State University's peer leaders

<i>Category</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Gender	m	Male
	f	Female
Classification	s	Sophomore
	j	Junior
	sr	Senior
	gr	Graduate
Semester(s) Served	1	one semester
	2	two semesters
	3	three semesters
	4	four semesters
G.P.A	a	less than 3.0
	b	between 3.0 and 3.5
	c	over 3.5
Had a Peer Leader	y	Yes
	n	No

The experience of peer leaders at Pink State University was characterized by: (1) Positive Interactions; (2) Helped their First-Year Students; (3) A Desire to be Liked; (4) Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles; (5) A Commitment to Service; (6) Peer leaders as Academics, and (7) Impact on (their) Peer Leader Development.

Positive Interactions

All of Pink State University's peer leaders perceived that the experience was positive and they attributed this largely to the positive interactions that they had with the students and with their instructors. As one explained,

I believe that I had a great relationship with my students. We could talk about anything without being afraid of what was said. They were able to come to me with questions when they did not want to approach the lead teacher. (f/j/1/c/n)

Another claimed,

The relationship with my instructor was professional when needed, but generally, it was a friendship, one of great respect, and I feel fortunate to have experienced that. (f/j/1/c/n)

Eleven peer leaders expressed that having positive interactions with their students ensured that the

experience was meaningful for the students, the teacher and themselves. As one student explained," there has to be good interaction for them to get a lot out of it!"

(m/sr/2/b/y) Yet another explained how this type of interaction worked positively,

Instead of having two people and their ideas, one who is thirty or forty years old and a peer leader, we actually had all twenty people who were interjecting ideas on the subject of the day. We got them talking and got them to share their own ideas on what they were getting involved in. (m/sr/3/b/n)

Ten peer leaders spoke specifically about positive interactions specifically with instructors and how the value of the peer leading experience was contingent on that interaction. "It was utterly important that I worked with an instructor who was a lot of fun and someone who really wanted to get to know me and the students as well. Thank heavens I did because we had a lot of synergy!" (f/j/2/c/y)

Further, the interactions were not only perceived as positive, but as producing positive effects. One peer leader captured the feeling pointedly.

For one, the teachers got a chance to work with a student and it gave them some better ideas of how to

teach their other classes. So that was a good experience for them. On the other hand, the peer leader had the honor of working with the teacher, setting up lesson plans, talking to them and watching them lecture. Then there was the peer leader and student-- just a team working together, just a year or two in the age difference. So the students got a lot out of having a peer leader because that was a connection for them between the teachers. It was a win-win-win situation for all. (m/j/2/c/y)

Despite the fact that the overall experience involved positive interactions with students, six of the peer leaders yearned for a warmer relationship with their students. "It was an eye opener that they viewed me as an instructor. They would talk to me in class but like I said before, nobody shared any personal experiences with me and that was a shock to me just because I wanted to help them," cited one peer leader (f/s/2/c/y).

Helped their First-Year Students

Overwhelming, the respondents from Pink State University claimed that they positively impacted their first-year students and helped them succeed in their first year at college. As one indicated, "I am confident that I

helped them succeed to a good extent. I wasn't with them 24 hours a day, but I was there at times to offer help, advice and experiences" (f/s/1/c/n). Yet another expressed,

I feel that I equipped them with the confidence they needed to be successful in college. I believe I have encouraged them to explore what the university can do for them, and I have encouraged them not to let the transition and hardship of the first semester get them down and to return for the second semester.

(f/sr/3/c/y)

Pink's peer leaders also believed that they provided their students with the self-assurance to succeed, academically and socially. As one explained, "They left the class knowing how to better use the resources provided by the university and ready to battle the life stresses that were facing them" (f/s/1/c/n). Yet another, "They are more aware of campus resources, student involvement, and becoming an active part of the campus community" (m/s/2/c/n).

While at least six peer leaders believed that they gave the students a different perspective of college life, "Students have a hard time buying into some of the stuff teachers tell them, and I was there to tell them about real

life experiences with college," (f/s/1/c/y) five of them believed that they made their students' transition into college easier just by providing them with a setting to express concerns, questions, and accomplishments.

While most of my students were very bright, they just needed a kind of 'homeroom' environment to learn about the nuts and bolts of college, hear the perspectives of others in a relaxed environment, and know that an upperclassman that cared for them was always available in case they needed a question answered or if they needed to talk. (m/j/1/b/n)

Desire to be Liked

All of the respondents said it was important to them that their students liked them and believed that if their students liked them, they would have a greater influence on them.

It is very important that your students like you and see common traits between them and you. They have to like you and want to hear from you. If they do not feel comfortable around you there will be no way you can be of use to them on a peer level. (f/j/1/c/y)

Another peer leader claimed that "as a leader you have to be liked or the people will not want to follow you" (m/sr/2/b/y).

Pink's peer leaders tended to use words like, trust and respect interchangeably in describing relationships between peer leaders and peers:

If the students like you and respect you then they will trust you. I also felt that before students can feel free to come and ask me questions or confide in me, they must like me and feel like I am a friend to them. (f/j/1/c/n)

Another explained, "I don't like it when anyone doesn't like me. Part of being a peer leader is being there for the students to talk to, and they won't talk to you if they don't trust and respect you" (f/sr/2/b/y)

Eight peer leaders were clear that students have to be able to trust you in order to talk to you about problems. They explained that it was important that there be mutual trust "I think the students have to trust you and the other students in order for them to actually confide in you or speak out in classes" (f/j/1/c/n). In general, 5 peer leaders felt strongly that since the role of a peer leader involved dealing with sensitive issues like students

grades, it required peer leaders to present themselves to their students as being trustworthy and responsible. As one expressed it,

You are given a great deal of responsibilities. You are grading, helping grade, plus you are working with them on their grades for their other classes and so that kind of information is not something you should be running around telling everyone. You have responsibilities. (f/sr/2/b/y)

Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles

Pink State University's peer leaders experienced obstacles during their experience as peer leaders, yet they remained steadfast to their role as peer leaders and overcame these obstacles. All of the respondents identified personal and/or institutional challenges that they encountered during their tenure as peer leaders. The most often cited "hurdles" they faced related to dealing with the challenges of being a peer and role model/teacher at the same time, and to managing their time.

Nine peer leaders found trying to deal with the multiple, often conflicting roles of being a peer and someone in authority and trying to be professional while

desiring to be a friend frequently proved to be awkward and challenging.

You want to be the role model or person who addresses issues that might be detrimental to them and you want to say, "No, that is bad, you are breaking the rules," yet, you don't want to lose their friendship. It is kind of a catch 22. (m/sr/2/c/n)

Another peer leader explained, "I think the hardest thing for me was getting the students to realize they could come to me as a fellow student and friend." (f/j/1/b/y)

In the face of these role conflicts they spoke about struggling with them but also persisting in trying to work them out.

I had to establish what the terms of our relationship were as their teacher or mentor: I wanted them to see me as a professional; however, see that I was more laid back than my lead teacher. Despite the professionalism that went with the role I worked hard to get my students to come to me for help and for me to help them with their problems. (f/s/1/c/n)

Another claimed, "I think it was awkward for some students to relate to me due to the fact that they had never had a student/teacher," but, she continued, "I constantly let the

students in my class know that they could come and talk to me about anything and that I was a student dealing with many of the same things they were" (f/s/3/b/y).

Eight peer leaders explained that they overcame some of these challenges by being intentional about trying to find a "middle ground" when dealing with conflicting role situations. "I avoided any type of circumstances that I did not want to get involved with—like attending a party where I knew under aged students would be drinking, since I recognized that I was working for the school" (f/j/2/b/n). Similarly, they were intentional about keeping classroom chatter and discussions relevant to classroom topics, thus avoiding being placed in compromising situations. As one peer leader explained, "If the instructor and I kept them busy enough they wouldn't have too much idle time to discuss such subjects" (f/s/1/b/y). Another explained,

My teacher and I both let our class know that we realized we live in a real world and that students weren't always going to do everything by the book. Because we realized this, we told the students they could come to us with problems and we would do everything we could to help them, not get them in trouble. (f/s/2/c/y)

The challenges of juggling roles also applied to the many activities in which peer leaders were involved and to the activities encountered in managing all they had to do. "My biggest hurdle was making time for peer leader responsibilities and demands. I must maintain an outside job to pay rent, and maintain full-time student status to receive my academic scholarship" (f/sr/3/c/n). Another explained, "Toward the end of the semester, around finals, it became sometimes hard to find the time to get things done with school, friends, family, and peer leadership-- to top it off" (m/j/1/c/n). However, their resolve to overcome these obstacles and their success in doing so were equally evident as they described their experience. "I learned to use my time wisely; It was the only way I can get everything done" (f/sr/2/b/y). Another explained,

As with all time management problems, I prioritized what I needed to get done. I used all the small portions of extra time to do what I could. I tried to cut a little out of my busy schedule. Didn't really happen, but I managed to get by. Now I know what I need to do differently to help alleviate the stress and worries of being too involved. (m/sr/2/a/y)

Commitment to Service

A commitment to service, or a desire to help others was a major theme in why all of them became peer leaders and nine peer leaders specifically raised this commitment in describing their experiences. As one peer leader admitted, "It was my desire to work with others because that is what the program is---working and helping others for everyone's benefit" (f/s/1/c/y). Another expressed,

I wanted all freshmen to succeed. I wanted everyone to go to college and I wanted everybody to finish their education and if there is some way that I can help them do that then peer leading was a way that I could help get people on the right track. (f/sr/3/c/y)

And yet another,

I wanted to build a strong relationship with them (the students) because I wanted them to continue to have me as a source, as a reference for a job. I wanted to kind of walk with them along the way to make sure that they were still happy, if there was anything I could do to make their college experience better, that is what I wanted to do and so the bottom line is I just wanted to give back. (m/j/1/c/n)

This desire "to give back;" to serve others; echoes the University's public affairs mission, which is alive and well in the peer leader program. "We're committed to helping students succeed in their own lives and as active citizens" according to the program director.

Peer leaders as Academics

Pink State University's peer leaders perceived their role to be an academic one, and the position as serving students in an academic capacity. They were trained to approach peer leading from an academic perspective, had academic responsibilities, and were treated as co-teachers. This fostered the perception that the role of peer leader was an academic one. As the program director confirmed, "I place a lot of emphasis on preparing peer leaders to be competent co-teachers. They have to create lesson plans, I have them practice ice breakers and do "mock" teaching segments."

Not surprisingly, the peer leaders' impressions of how they helped freshmen succeed revolved around campus/academic issues rather than personal ones. As one stated, "I helped several first year students in becoming resident assistants" (f/j/1/c/y). Yet another stated,

Few students treated me as a peer. They would only ask serious questions about school. I provided them (the students) with the reassurance of themselves to succeed at the university... They left the class knowing how to better use the resources provided by the university and are more aware of campus resources. (f/sr/2/c/y)

Peer leaders were aware that the academic framing of the role imposed limitations on the relationships they could establish with students. As one peer leader explained, "I wanted my main focus to be more of an instructor, more of a role model. However, I didn't get as close to them as I wanted to" (f/s/1/b/y). Yet another added,

I gave them my phone number, I gave them my contact information and I told them to feel free to call me and nobody ever did. It was a little disheartening for me just because we never got close and if I see them now on campus they don't view me as a friend; they view me more as an instructor. (f/j/2/c/y)

It is noteworthy that the academic background of the program director is business communication. Her academic training was reflected in her leadership style and clearly

impacted how the peer leaders viewed their role and how they presented themselves to their students. For example, in an attempt to get the peer leaders to think of their position as a professional one---an academic one, the director sponsors an etiquette dinner for the peer leaders each semester. There is a formality and rigidity in her approach and she places a strong emphasis on limiting the role of the peer leader to classroom work by providing them with a rigid schedule of what needs to be accomplished. "I have an agenda for every class period, a lesson plan and we usually have about seven items on the agenda and we stick to it..."

Impact on Peer leader Development

All the respondents claimed that the experience helped them to develop as persons. "Peer leadership has helped me develop as a person. I feel more comfortable as a leader. The role improved my confidence level and I got to know many new people and began to network" (m/sr/2/b/n). Pink's peer leaders explained that being a peer leader helped them to improve their communication skills and leadership skills, increase their appreciation for teachers and prepare for a future career.

Eleven peer leaders indicated that the experience helped them enhance their communication skills. "I am more outgoing and comfortable in front of people and I am considering becoming a professor one day," explained one peer leader (f/sr/2/c/y). "My confidence in speaking improved from teaching," offered one peer leader. Another revealed,

It (the experience) gave me more confidence in my choice of words, work I do, and how I carry myself... It has made me more outgoing, and these qualities will eventually help me in my career. I am majoring in business and the confidence I gained from peer leading will be very important in selling myself and my company to my clients. (f/s/1/c/n)

In addition to enhancing their communication skills, according to 10 students, their experiences as a peer leader helped to develop and affirm their leadership skills. "Being a peer leader has made me feel more responsible... Because I have been a role model for dozens of students, I feel much more capable of being in a leadership role" (f/sr/3/c/n). One peer leader felt certain that peer leading had helped him to develop as a leader because it gave him a "dual experience." He explained, "On

one side, I am in a leadership role in a functional classroom, and on the other side I am a part of a functional business organization in peer leadership" (f/sr/3/c/n). Yet another revealed,

I think as a peer leader to know that other people are coming to you for help affirms you as a leader; that these kids trust you enough to ask you questions like: "When do I schedule for this?" Or, "What am I going to do?" I think it creates positive reinforcement on the person. (f/sr/2/c/y)

In addition to being evaluated on their performance as a co-instructor, students rate Pink's peer leaders on items like "dress and appearance, personal hygiene, and punctuality". This, said one peer leader, "gave one a feel of what it is like to lead people; having them watch you like a manager or supervisor does" (f/j/2/b/y). Another peer leader confirmed that "being evaluated on this level was a valuable experience." (m/sr/3/c/y)

Pink's peer leaders also described the experience in terms of how much more respect and appreciation they now had for teachers. "Now that I've been a peer leader, I strongly believe the students' success is largely based on the teacher and how the teacher approaches the course,"

said one peer leader (m/j/1/c/n). At least eight peer leaders claimed that working with their instructor helped them to see "the other side" of the classroom and allowed them to witness another perspective of college life. "This in itself, I believe, has greatly impacted my college life and how I view the university. I feel privileged that I can see things from both a faculty and a student's point of view" (f/sr/2/c/y). Another claimed that her perspective on teachers had changed. "I appreciate what they (instructors) do and now I try to cut them a little slack" (m/j/2/b/y). Some admitted that by seeing the classroom experience from another angle allowed them to "compromise" when dealing with an authority figure. "It has made me realize how hard being a teacher can be... There are always going to be students who don't want to listen to you. But now I have a lot more respect for my mediocre teachers, and tons of respect for my great ones." (f/j/1/c/n)

At least 11 peer leaders mentioned that in one way or another experience helped to affirm their career choices or better prepare them for future careers. "By taking part in this experience I was able to gain confidence in my teaching abilities and it also reassured my doubts about my ability to succeed in the education field" (f/sr/3/b/y).

Another revealed, "I got a sense of what it is like leading people; having them watch me for guidance like a manager or supervisor does, which is a valuable experience since I am planning to go into the business field" (m/j/2/b/n).

Chapter 7

Cross-Case Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars by examining these experiences in three different sites: Blue University, Yellow University and Pink State University. The research questions which framed and guided the study were:

1. How do peer leaders describe their peer leadership experiences?
2. Does social interdependence theory explain the kind of peer leader experiences that emerge?
 - a. Is the type of interdependence that exists among the group competitive or cooperative?
 - b. In what ways did the type of interaction that exists affect the outcome of the experiences?

The chapter details the findings of the cross-case analysis of the experiences of peer leaders in the three programs in answer to research question 1, and relates those experiences to social interdependence theory, thereby addressing research question 2.

Question 1: How do peer leaders describe their peer leadership experiences?

Five themes emerged from the cross-case analysis of the data that were consistent across all three institutions. These were: (1) Positive Interactions; (2) Helped their First-Year students; (3) Desire to be liked; (4) Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles, and (5) the Impact on (their) Peer Leader Development.

Overwhelmingly, peer leaders from the three institutions described their experiences in terms of the positive interactions that occurred during their experiences, primarily with students, but also with the faculty member with whom they taught. Seventy-nine of the 83 respondents (95%) indicated that their experience as a peer leader was a very positive one. The general consensus was that peer leaders experienced positive interactions with their students and with their instructors and they always spoke about the experience in positive terms. To this end, over 70% of the 83 peer leaders cited examples of this. To be fair, it must be noted that in more ways than one, peer leaders do not portray a true representation of the general population of students. They are subject to a

rigorous selection process and must possess specific qualifications in order to be given such a position.

As part of the positive experience, peer leaders saw the work of peer leaders as important and meaningful. They truly believed that peer leaders were important, that peer leaders make a difference, and that they had made a difference. Moreover, they perceived that they had just not been successful in institutional terms, but in personal ones, for example, that they had made a difference in the lives of others. The majority of them (64%), had had a peer leader when then they were freshmen and a peer leader had affected them in one way or another. Many became peer leaders as a result of the experience with a peer leader, and they brought this positive preconception about importance and impact of peer leaders to the experience.

Undoubtedly, the national recognition given to Yellow's program and their treatment of peer leaders as professionals impacted Yellow's peer leaders perception of their role as a prestigious one. This was somewhat different from Blue's peer leaders who saw their position as role models and as vital to linking the student, teacher and the university. In spite of differences in how they perceived and defined the importance and prestige of their

role, both sets of peer leaders saw themselves as valuable, if not vital, to the success of freshman students and believed that they had helped freshman students succeed. Moreover, they enumerated the numerous qualities that they possessed which they believed were assets to peer leading, and cited numerous examples to demonstrate how they believed they had helped students succeed, adding to the notion that they perceived their role to be an important one.

Being a peer leader was not necessarily easy, but they perceived it was worth it. Peer leaders faced challenges related to time management, role conflict (e.g., between peer leader and students) and interpersonal conflicts (e.g., differences with professors). These challenges were not a deterrent to continuing in the role or to doing it again. In fact, 57% indicated that they had served as a peer leader for two or more semesters. They returned for a second, and for some, a third term. They saw obstacles as something to be confronted and overcome. The peer leaders proved amazingly resilient in dealing with the challenges and felt competent and good about having done so. Amazingly, 92% percent of them maintained a grade point of average of 3.0 or above.

It was interesting to discover that in one way or another, all of the respondents said that it was important to them that their students liked them, and they were greatly disturbed when they felt that a student did not. These peer leaders believed if they were to be successful in their work, they had to be "liked" by their students. They contended that if they were not liked by their students then these students would not take their advice nor take them seriously. Even more surprising was the fact that these peer leaders saw little to no difference between the terms "like," "trust" and "respect," and even suggested that the three ideals were dependent on each other. These words were used interchangeably when describing the relation between the peer leaders and peers, between peers and peers, and the overall group dynamics of the classroom. Collectively, it was the opinion of the peer leaders that if their students liked them, they would have a better, greater influence on them.

Overwhelmingly, the data revealed that the peer leaders perceived that the experience positively impacted their own development. Of the 83 peer leaders, 79 perceived that being a peer leader had changed them significantly. They reported changes in numerous areas, ranging from

improving and acquiring skills to sharpening their career choices. Peer leaders at all three institutions, in one way or another, expressed that they developed a stronger sense of self because of the satisfaction that they gained from helping others. They also claimed that their leadership and communication skills were shaped and enhanced. These peer leaders also indicated that in some way, shape or form their career choices were sharpened, either because they had acquired and/or perfected skills required for the teaching profession, or they had gained some type of skill through the experience that prepared them for the workforce. Moreover, they felt they had become more open minded and gained a new respect for other cultures.

Clearly, some characteristics of the experience of peer leaders appeared to be idiosyncratic to the institution, such as, Commitment to Service at Pink State University, or Loyalty to Blue in the responses from Blue's participants. It is not that these notions did not play a part at the other institutions. Indeed, there was some hint of all of the characteristics at all institutions. However, they were not nearly as characteristic of the experience of every peer leader. Nothing in these characteristics

affected or detracted from the findings that transcend the three cases.

Relation to Social Interdependence Theory

Social interdependence theory hypothesizes that the way interdependence among goals is structured will determine how group members interact with each other and thus, to a great extent, the outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Two types of interdependence are posited: (1) positive or cooperative interdependence, which leads to promotive interaction; and (2) negative or competitive interdependence, which leads to oppositional interaction (see Figures 1a and 1b for outcomes of positive and negative interaction). Consequently, each of these types of interaction affects the outcomes differently (Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

Question 2(a): Is the type of interdependence that exists among the group competitive or cooperative?

One of the goals of this study was to find out the kind of social interdependence that peer leaders experienced in their roles as peer leaders of first year seminars and the outcomes that emerged from their interactions with the first year students that they served. The type of interdependence that existed among the group

was cooperative rather than competitive. The experiences of peer leaders at Blue University, Yellow University and Pink State University were clearly and overwhelmingly characterized by positive interactions, thus matching the theoretically defined notion of positive interdependence. This match, along with the descriptions of the nature of their interactions, makes it reasonable to describe the peer leader-student relationship as fitting the predicted promotive interaction.

Conversely, if the experiences of the peer leaders had been characterized by competitive interaction (as involving bad relations within the group, with individuals opposing and hindering each other's efforts), then one would have expected that their experiences would be perceived as negative ones.

Question 2(b): In what ways did the type of interaction that exists affect the outcome of the experiences?

The theory of social interdependence purports that how individuals interact within a situation affects the outcomes. In positive/promotive interaction there are three broad and interrelated outcomes of positive interdependence: effort exerted to achieve, quality of relationships, and psychological health and social

competence (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). As we have seen throughout the study, the positive interaction that existed was wrought by numerous variables, including mutual care and assistance, healthy communication, ability to manage conflict, trust, respect, etc. Since the theory of social interdependence posits that "there are bidirectional relationships between these outcomes," (p. 168), each of these variables causes and is caused by the other. The type of interaction that existed in the experiences of the peer leaders (namely positive or cooperative interaction) affected the outcome of their experiences as peer leaders in terms of the three broad and interrelated outcomes of positive interdependence as posited by the theory.

Effort to Achieve

Speaking about social interdependence theory and effort to achieve, Johnson and Johnson (1989) contend, "No matter how intellectually capable or skilled individuals are, if they do not exert considerable effort and seek to achieve challenging goals, their productivity will be low" (p. 6). The data clearly show that peer leaders at all three institutions expended both physical and psychological energy to successfully fulfill their roles as peer leaders: All had to overcome hurdles by successfully managing their time, juggling roles and finding a balance between being a

student and a leader. Yet, they willingly confronted and overcame these hurdles. Moreover, they worked hard at creating caring, healthy relationships with their students. This was evident in how they conducted themselves during their tenure as a peer leader and in the numerous relationships that continued even after their roles as a peer leader ended.

Positive Relationships

Committed efforts to achieve tend to engender positive relationships and cohesiveness among the group as they work together, according to the theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Moreover, cohesiveness in a group is determined by how well members like each other and how well conflict is managed (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). As we have seen, these peer leaders worked to achieve positive relationships with their students and with the instructors. Not only was it important that their students liked them, but they also cared deeply about their students, were committed to their students and had a desire to make a difference.

It is highly suggestive that the positive relationships by the peer leaders were also experienced by the students. Moreover, that there was cohesiveness and a

connection between them, even when they were interacting at a professional level.

Psychological Adjustment and Social Competence

Another outcome of positive social interdependence is psychological adjustment and social competence, "the ability (cognitive capacities, motivational orientations, and social skills) to develop, maintain, and appropriately modify interdependent relationships with others to succeed in achieving goals" (p.139). Psychological adjustment and social competence tend to increase positive relationships, perspective taking ability, sense of direction and purpose and sense of identity (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

Self actualization and the acquisition of an array of personal and professional skills were noted outcomes of the experience. These peer leaders found direction and purpose for the future and a stable sense of personal identity. Ninety percent of all respondents said they were changed by the experience. Not only were their social and speaking skills enhanced, but they achieved a clearer sense of direction and purpose. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the experience promoted greater psychological adjustment and social competence as predicted by the theory.

Using the five themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis of the data that were consistent across all three institutions: (1) Positive Interactions; (2) Helped their First-Year students; (3) Desire to be liked; (4) Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles, and (5) the Impact on (their) Peer Leader Development, Figure 7a presents how the theory of social interdependence allows for describing the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminar programs and for predicting the outcomes of the experience.

As may be seen, the experiences were marked by **positive interdependence** (see center of figure 7a), which determined how the group members interacted with each other. Clearly, this positive interdependence led to **positive interactions** (Finding 1) among the members of the group. Moreover, since the experiences of the peer leaders were characterized by **positive interdependence** the peer leaders were highly positive about their experiences.

The outcomes of positive interactions (Finding 1), as purported by the theory of social interdependence are: **positive relationships** (see {A} in Figure 7a), **psychological adjustment and social competence** (see {B} in Figure 7a) and **effort to achieve**, (see {C} in Figure 7a).

These three outcomes appear to have been realized in this study.

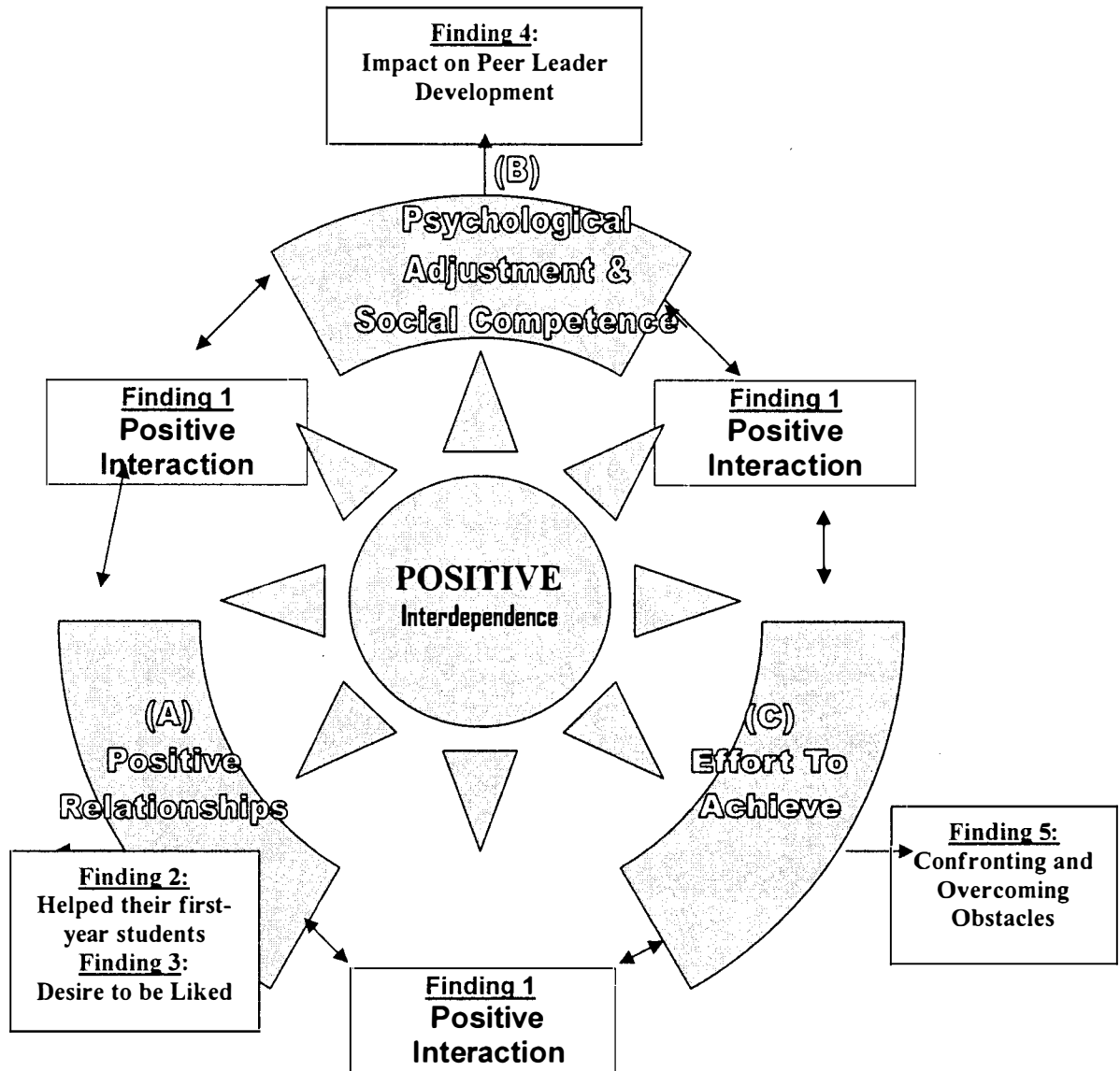


Figure 7a. Relationship of Findings to Social Interdependence Theory. Derived from Outcomes of Cooperation in *Circles of Learning*, by Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. & Holubee, E. 1993. 4th ed. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Firstly, the experiences were marked by **Positive Relationships** (A). Throughout this study there was recurring evidence of how the peer leaders helped their first-year students to succeed (Finding 2) and their desire to be liked by their students (Finding 3). Johnson and Johnson (1998) contend that while the process of acceptance begins with positive interdependence, relationships become more caring and committed as the interaction continues. Secondly, they contend that these positive relationships promote **Psychological Health and Social Competence** (B) and serve as the main influences on personal development and identity. To this end, Finding 4: Impact on Peer Leader Development, emerged as a strong theme in support of outcome (B). Finally, the theory of social interdependence purports that positive interdependence increases one's **Effort to Achieve** (C). Throughout this study we saw compelling evidence that peer leaders exerted extensive efforts to overcome obstacles that might have hindered their achievement of goals and levels of productivity. Thus, in Finding 5: Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles, we see just that.

Chapter 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of peer leaders in first-year seminars by examining these experiences in three different contexts: Blue University, Yellow University and Pink State University. The research questions which framed and guided the study were:

1. How do peer leaders describe their peer leadership experiences?
2. Does social interdependence theory explain the kind of peer leader experiences that emerge?
 - a. Is the type of interdependence that exists among the group competitive or cooperative?
 - b. In what ways did the type of interaction that exists affect the outcome of the experiences?

The sample for this study consisted of 83 peer leaders from three institutions in different geographic areas of the country: Blue University, Yellow University and Pink State University. Data were collected from (1) questionnaires distributed to the peer leaders at the three sites, (2) on-site interviews with selected peer leaders

(n=16) and the program director(s) at each site (n=5), (3) institutional documents about the peer leadership program at each site, and (4) researcher field notes gathered during two-day visits to each site.

The data were analyzed by site, to arrive at the themes and categories that characterized the peer leader experience at each site. The data were then used to develop case reports of Blue, Yellow and Pink State Universities. The individual case analyses were then compared to identify the themes common to the experiences of peer leaders across sites, and thus answer research question 1. The findings were then used to consider the relation between the peer leaders' experiences and social interdependence theory, research question 2.

This chapter provides a summary of the findings of the study, a discussion of those findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Findings

The experiences of peer leaders across sites were characterized by:

1. The Positive Interactions they experienced with students and staff;

2. The belief that they Helped their Students in their capacity as a peer leader;
3. A Desire to be liked by their students, which generally was realized;
4. Confronting and Overcoming Obstacles in terms of time management, conflict resolution and setting boundaries and
5. Positive Impact on Development in terms of gaining personal, social and career skills.

Discussion of the Results

The study grew out of the researcher's interest and previous work on peer leadership. Her personal knowledge and respect for the important work that peer leaders accomplish on her own campus made this study interesting and rewarding. At the beginning of the study, it was the researcher's belief that the experiences of peer leaders would benefit them, although there was no empirical research to support this. After completing the study, the researcher found that the experiences of peer leaders at the institutions studied did indeed benefit the peer leaders and were strongly suggestive, although not definitive, of the benefits of peer leading generally.

To be fair, it is conceivable that these results do

not typify the experience of all peer leaders at all institutions, since the institutions that were used in this study were exemplars: nationally recognized and well-established. It may be that the highly positive nature of the experiences owes more to the institutions studied than to the experience. However, it is not inconceivable, that with variations, it may have kernels of truth about peer leaders in all institutions.

With respect to the theory of social interdependence, even if the peer leader experiences are negative, characterized by competition, the theory would appear to be equally effective in predicting the outcomes as it is with positive, cooperative, interdependence. The fact that the experience was highly positive and beneficial may owe as much to the fact that the peer leaders began their experience with a positive disposition. They themselves spoke about what a positive experience they had had with their own peer leader when they were freshmen. Likewise, they came with the disposition to make a difference. And make a difference they did! The power of knowing that one is going to have a good experience could have influenced the results and could have become a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The experiences of the peer leaders in relation to social interdependence theory were characterized by: 1. the cooperative (versus competitive) nature of the experience and 2. the positive outcomes of positive interdependence as predicted by the theory. In the end, the results of the study affirm the usefulness of social interdependence theory for studying the peer leader experiences, whether they were positive or negative.

While the literature was devoid of information on the benefits of peer leading on peer leaders, anecdotal information suggested that they benefited from the experience. This study provides empirical evidence to support the validity of those anecdotal claims. While additional research will be necessary to ensure the validity of the claim itself, the results of this study go a long way to providing a sound beginning basis for doing so.

Further, while the study was not directed to the impact of the experience on students, but rather on the peer leaders themselves, the results are not inconsistent with Astin's (1993) findings that "the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398) and

the most influential source for values, beliefs, and goals. It undoubtedly supports Astin's work on the value of student to student impact and lends credence to the growing use of peer leaders on university campuses.

Conclusions

The conclusions that can reasonably be drawn from the study are:

1. Peer leaders derived personal, social and career building benefits from serving as peer leaders.
2. Serving as a peer leader appears to be an overwhelmingly positive experience for those who choose to do so.
3. Social interdependence theory would appear to be a useful model for predicting the kind of experiences that peer leaders have with their students.

Recommendations for Research

Based on the findings of the study, a number of research studies would add to our understanding of the peer leading experience. To this end it would be facilitative to:

1. Replicate this study with a number and variety of other institutions with peer leader programs, including schools that do not enjoy the high profile,

positive reputations as do the institutions used in the study, to see if the same results emerge and the theory of social interdependence continues to be predictive of the experience of the peer leaders.

2. Develop a survey based on the findings of the study to learn more about the experience of peer leaders in institutions throughout the U.S., thereby gaining the breadth of view that was not achieved in this study.
3. Develop a series of individual case studies of peer leaders as they engage in the experience to get an in depth understanding of the peer leader experience.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Peer Leader Questionnaire

GENERAL INFORMATION

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <p>a. Gender: Male___ or Female___</p> <p>b. Classification: Fr___</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Soph___ Jr___ Sr___</p> <p>c. Semesters served as a peer leader: 1___ 2___ 3___ 4+___</p> <p>d. G.P.A (based on a 4.0 scale):
_____</p> <p>e. Did you have a peer leader as a college freshman? Yes___ No___</p> | <p>f. Check appropriate circles below to indicate where you have held other leadership positions in college:</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>☐ Res Assistant</td> <td>☐ Tutor</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Varsity sports</td> <td>☐ Minority Mentor</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Greek Life</td> <td>☐ Intramurals</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Work study</td> <td>☐ Newspaper Staff</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Music group</td> <td>☐ Recruitment</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Academic club</td> <td>☐ Honor society</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Ministry group</td> <td>☐ Local Chapter:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Student Govt.</td> <td>☐ Community Agency</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Service club</td> <td>☐ other_____</td> </tr> </table> | ☐ Res Assistant | ☐ Tutor | ☐ Varsity sports | ☐ Minority Mentor | ☐ Greek Life | ☐ Intramurals | ☐ Work study | ☐ Newspaper Staff | ☐ Music group | ☐ Recruitment | ☐ Academic club | ☐ Honor society | ☐ Ministry group | ☐ Local Chapter: | ☐ Student Govt. | ☐ Community Agency | ☐ Service club | ☐ other_____ |
| ☐ Res Assistant | ☐ Tutor | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ Varsity sports | ☐ Minority Mentor | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ Greek Life | ☐ Intramurals | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ Work study | ☐ Newspaper Staff | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ Music group | ☐ Recruitment | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ Academic club | ☐ Honor society | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ Ministry group | ☐ Local Chapter: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ Student Govt. | ☐ Community Agency | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ Service club | ☐ other_____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Question 1:

a) How and when did you first find out about your institution's peer leader program? and

b) Who or what led you to become involved in your institution's peer leader program?

Question 2:

What is your definition of a peer leader?

Question 3:

What were your reasons for becoming a peer leader? Please elaborate.

Question 4:

Based on your experiences as a peer leader, what do you believe were some of the qualities that you possessed that were assets to being a peer leader?

Question 5:

Has your experience as a peer leader met your expectations? If yes, in what way(s). If no, why do you think this is the case?

Question 6:

a) What were some of the "hurdles" that you experienced as a peer leader:

- Personal: (qualities that you possess that might be challenges beyond peer leading and may have conflicted with your peer leading duties).
- Institutional: (school rules or policies associated with curricular and co-curricular activities).

b) How were you able to overcome any of these hurdles?

- Personal:
- Institutional:

Question 7:

Was it important to you that your students liked or accepted you? Why?

Question 8:

Describe your relationship with your students?

Question 9:

Has peer leading helped or hindered your development as a person? Please explain.

Question 10:

a) To what extent do you believe that you helped your first-year students to succeed?

b) provide an example or two:

Question 11:

Has being a peer leader changed you? If so how?

Letter to accompany the questionnaire

S U Z A N N E L. H A M I D

Doctoral Candidate

Dear Peer Leader:

I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation on peer leaders. As vital as peer leaders are to the process of student success in first year seminars, we know little about the effects of the experience on peer leaders themselves. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the effects of student leadership experiences on peer leaders in first-year seminars. You have been identified as having served as a peer leader in first-year seminars and as a result, you are kindly asked to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this research and participation in this study will require only a minimal amount of your time and effort. Your program director will not be given access to the data gathered which will be returned to me in the accompanying self-addressed envelope. All data gathered will be aggregated for reporting purposes. The results of this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at professional meetings, but if this happens, no individuals will be identified or identifiable.

Your completion and return of the survey will signify your informed consent to participate in this study. No compensation is being offered for your participation. In addition, this study is being conducted as part of the requirements for an Ed.D program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. It is not associated in any way

with your institution. *When you have completed the survey, place it in the enclosed stamped envelope and send by return mail. Please return the completed form no later than [REDACTED]*

If you have any questions that have not been answered please do not hesitate to contact me. Contact information is provided below. At the bottom of the questionnaire you are invited to participate in an individual interview to be held at a later time on your campus. **If you are interested in doing so, please complete the bottom portion of this letter and send it in the separate reply envelope that is provided.**

Sincerely,

Suzanne L. Hamid

408 Barberry Drive. Cleveland, TN. 37312

Phone: 423-614-8623. E-Mail: shamid@leeuniversity.edu

Tear here and enclose in separate envelope that is provided

I would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview to be held on my campus for the purpose of providing additional information for this study.

I understand that follow up communication will provide me with information about the specific day and time for this interview. I understand that all names, including that of the institution, will be removed, and all data will be aggregated for reporting purposes.

SIGNATURE

PRINT

DATE

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

E-MAIL

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Study: The experiences peer leaders in first-year seminars

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Introduction: Researcher will describe the study, and remind the interviewee about the following: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) types of data being collected, (c) what will be done with the data to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees, and (d) the proposed length of the interview. Researcher will ask the interviewee to read and sign the consent form.

Questions:

1. Could you describe the kinds of interactions that you experienced with your students and faculty partner?
2. Do you think you affected your students in any way(s)? How?
3. Describe your relationship with your students.
4. Was peer leading difficult or easy? Explain.
5. Has peer leading affected you personally? How?
6. If given the opportunity, would you become a peer leader again?
Why or why not?

Following the questions, the researcher will thank the peer leaders for their cooperation and participation in the interview, and assure them of the confidentiality of their responses.

Appendix C

Approval Letter from Program Director

Dear Peer Leader Program Director:

I am presently conducting a study as part of the requirements for an Ed. D program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I plan to look at the experiences of Peer Leaders in First-Year Seminars. I would like to request your permission to disseminate a questionnaire with eleven questions to the peer leaders in your peer leadership program. At the bottom of the questionnaire, students will also be asked to indicate whether they are willing to participate in a later interview. I will then pay a visit to your institution to conduct individual interviews with 5-8 of those students who expressed an interest in being interviewed. All data will be aggregated for reporting purposes and neither the students nor your institution will be identified.

I also wish to seek your assistance in collecting official and unofficial publications and artifacts from your institution relative to the operation of the peer leadership program. These documents and artifacts could include training manuals, reports, minutes and scrapbooks. Any guiding research and literature that influenced the design and operation for your program will also be helpful to this study.

If you will graciously allow your peer leaders to participate in this study and will assist me in collecting additional materials relative to your peer leader program, please sign and complete the information below. Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Suzanne L. Hamid
Director of First-Year Programs

I grant permission to have a questionnaire disseminated to peer leaders from my institution and to a follow-up interview with 5-8 of those students who agree to be interviewed. I will also assist you in obtaining documents and artifacts relative to the operation of the peer leadership program.

Signature of Program Director

Date

Appendix D

Letter to Director of Peer Leader Program

Dear Name

Thank you for your initial interest in my research on peer leadership which I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. As vital as peer leaders are to the process of student success in first year seminars, we know little about the effects of the experience on peer leaders themselves. The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of student leadership experiences on peer leaders in first-year seminars.

There are no risks or discomforts to students or the institution associated with this research and participation in this study will require only the dissemination of the enclosed questionnaire to current students who have served or are serving as peer leaders on your campus. As director of your institution's peer leader program, I recognize the importance of having your endorsement to this project. Hence, I am soliciting your assistance and would be ever so grateful if you can do the following: explain the nature of the study to your peer leaders, encourage them to participate while explaining that their involvement is voluntary and that there will be no penalty for not completing the form, and disseminate the questionnaire guided by directions that I am providing with this cover letter.

Each peer leader will be asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the researcher in the self-addressed envelope provided. While the questionnaire will be coded to identify the site, in order to

protect the identity of the respondents, participants will not be asked to put their names on the questionnaire and completion of the questionnaire will be considered to constitute voluntary, informed consent.

While the responses to the questionnaire will serve as my primary source of data, at the bottom of the questionnaire, respondents will be invited to participate in an individual interview to be held at a later time on campus. They will be asked to indicate their interest in participating in an interview by completing, tearing off and sending the separated reply in another envelope. Follow up communication will provide information to these students about the specific day and time for their interview. Participants will be informed that all names, including that of the institution, will be removed, and all data will be aggregated for reporting purposes. This will then be followed by a visit to your institution for the purpose of conducting the interviews with peer leaders who have volunteered for such interviews. The interviews will be conducted prior to the end of the spring 2003 term.

I also wish to seek your assistance in collecting official and unofficial publications and artifacts from your institution relative to the operation of the peer leadership program. These will be collected and analyzed so as to clarify and contextualize the information collected from the questionnaires and individual interviews. These documents and artifacts could include training manuals, reports, minutes and scrapbooks. Any guiding research and literature that influenced the design and operation for your program will also be helpful to this study.

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the participants when electronic communications are used. Only the body

text and the message date and time will be stored, and all header information, will be deleted. Similarly, all the data gathered during this study, will be kept strictly confidential. The results of this study may be published in educational journals or presented at professional meetings, but, if this happens, the identity of your students will be kept strictly confidential and every effort will be made to mask the identity of the institution. The transcriptions and questionnaires will be kept securely locked in a cabinet in the office of Dr. Norma T. Mertz for 3 years at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and will only be accessible by the researcher and Dr. Mertz, her committee chair. At the end of the analysis, all original audio tapes that might identify the participants will be destroyed.

You may ask any questions concerning the research either before agreeing to participate or during the research study. If you agree to participate in the study, would you be kind enough to sign the form below and return it to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope? Thank you very much for your consideration of this matter.

Signature of Program Director		Date

Sincerely,

Suzanne L Hamid

Phone: 423-614-8623 Phone 423-476-4103

Appendix E

Blue University Timeline for Recruitment and Selection

2001 Peer Leader Recruitment and Selection Time Line

Date	Task/Event
September 5	Request faculty/administration and student organization mailing materials, get labels from Registrar's Office for students who currently have at least a 3.0 GPA or higher
September 18 - 22	Send recruitment letter with nomination form to current peer leaders, graduate leaders, U101 faculty, faculty and administrators
September 26 - 27	Recruit PL's assistance for organization presentations/flyer distribution on 9/29 create list of buildings sign-up sheet)
September 29	Post Flyer/Posters with brochures around campus (Selected buildings: Wardlaw, BA, Honors College, RHUU, Preston) and in residence halls, Greek housing
October 9, 11, 13	████████ Brief about nominations for PL's
October 18	Reminder letter about nominations
October 11 - November 10	Presentations to selected organization meetings *(Fall Break October 16 - 17)
October 27	Nomination preferred submission date
October 30 nominators	Begin to send out thank you letter to
November 6 - 17	Ad on RHA Channel
November 6 - 30	Call those on the nomination lists about applying
November 13, 15	Article in the ██████████
November 20, 27	████████ Brief about application deadline
November 30	Suggested deadline for applications; begin rolling review of applications
January 17	Gamecock brief reminder of last deadline for PL

January 22	Final application deadline
January 24 & 25	Hold interviews for borderline candidates
January 26	Final notification of selection
January 31 February 1, 7 - 8	Training Workshops
March 22	Mandatory reception to meet instructors (PL, GL and instructors) *tentative
April 5, 9	Team-Building Mini-Workshops

Appendix F

Blue University Creed

The community of scholars at [REDACTED] is dedicated to personal and academic excellence.

Choosing to join the community obligates each member to a code of civilized behavior. As a [REDACTED]..

I will practice personal and academic integrity;

...a commitment to this ideal is inconsistent with cheating in classes, in games, or in sports. It should eliminate the practice of plagiarism or borrowing another student's homework, lying, deceit, excuse-making, and infidelity or disloyalty in personal relationships. ...

I will respect the dignity of all persons;

...a commitment to this ideal is inconsistent with behaviors which, compromise or demean the dignity of individuals or groups, including hazing, most forms of intimidating, taunting, teasing, baiting, ridiculing, insulting, harassing, and discriminating...

I will respect the rights and property of others;

...a commitment to this ideal is inconsistent with all forms of theft, vandalism, arson, misappropriation, malicious damage to, and desecration or destruction of property. Respect for others' personal rights is inconsistent with any behavior which violates their right to move about freely, express themselves appropriately, and to enjoy privacy...

I will discourage bigotry, while striving to learn from differences in people, ideas and opinions;

...a commitment to this ideal pledges affirmative support for equal rights and opportunities for all students regardless of their age, sex, race, religion, disability, international/ethnic heritage, socioeconomic status, political, social or other affiliation or disaffiliation, or affectional preference...

I will demonstrate concern for others, their feelings, and their need for conditions which support their work and development.

...a commitment to this ideal is a pledge to be compassionate and considerate, to avoid behaviors which are insensitive, inhospitable, or incitant, or which unjustly or arbitrarily inhibit others' ability to feel safe or welcomed in their pursuit of appropriate academic goals...

Allegiance to these ideals requires each [REDACTED] to refrain from and discourage behaviors which threaten the freedom and respect every individual deserves.

...this last clause reminds community members that they are not only obliged to avoid these behaviors, but that they also have an affirmative obligation to confront and challenge, to respond to, or report the behaviors whenever or wherever they are encountered.

Appendix G
Breakdown of Organizations by Sites

Type of Organization	Number of Blue University Peer Leaders	Number of Yellow University Peer Leaders	Number of Pink State University Peer Leaders	Total Number of Students
Residential Life	4	3	6	13
Greek Life	14	5	2	21
Varsity Sports	1	4	2	7
Work Study	4	1	3	8
Music Group	3	3	0	6
Academic Club	12	5	8	25
Ministry Group	5	5	3	13
Student Government	3	7	2	12
Service Club	12	6	4	22
Tutor	3	3	3	9
Minority Mentor	3	1	1	5
Intramurals	0	0	0	0
Newspaper Staff	0	0	0	0
Recruitment Staff	4	2	2	8
Honor Society	15	8	11	34
Community Agency	3	1	1	5
Other	8	1	2	11

Vitae

Suzanne L. Hamid, daughter of Burke and Helen Hamid was born on the island of Trinidad. She completed her elementary and high school education in Trinidad. In 1984 she migrated to the United States to further her education. Three years later, she graduated from Lee College, Cleveland, Tennessee with a B.A. in Communication. She later earned a Masters in Christian Education, and now in 2004, a Doctor of Education degree, with a major in Educational Administration and Policy Studies from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

In 1997 she became the Director of First-Year Programs at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee. In this capacity she oversees an office which she has created and developed. More recently Suzanne has focused her professional efforts on peer leadership. She is a frequent workshop presenter on this topic and is the editor-in-chief of a monograph on peer leadership (2001) which was released by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.