engage, enlighten, explore

at your library

Peer Learning @ the Library
Enhancing the Student Experience and
Developing Library Research Skills

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Jo Ann Murphy, Head Murray Library
University of Saskatchewan

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
University Library

library.usask.ca

Outline

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- Literature

- PAL and Peer Mentors at U of S

- Library Peer Mentor Pilot Project (yr 1, yr 2)

- Successes

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Introduction

- **Peer Mentorship in academic Institutions is a growing trend.**

- **A need to address student success, enrolment, and retention**.

  Often focused on:

  - ❖ First-year student programs across campus
  - ❖ Orientations, welcome week events etc....
  - ❖ Writing & Learning Centres

  Enhances student experience opportunities:

  - ❖ Experiential Learning
  - ❖ Collaborative Learning
  - ❖ Student Engagement
  - ❖ Leadership development

The Literature

Not a new concept

❖ Corporate world & human resource organizations

❖ Educational institutions & other academic libraries have been establishing peer mentoring and learning as part of their services

Incorporates a variety of learning theories (cognitive & social)

Exists in formal and in-formal educational settings

Peer Learning at U of S

- **Learning Commons Partnership – 2008**
  - ❖ Library, ITS, ULC, DSS, Consumer Services
  - ❖ Shared physical space
  - ❖ Cross unit & collaborative programs

- **University Learning Centre - PAL Peer Mentor Program**
  http://www.usask.ca/ulc/pal

  Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Peer Mentors are academically strong undergraduate students who take a lead role in developing and delivering learning support programs for students at the U of S. Some Peer Mentors lead course-specific study groups assigned to a select set of larger, traditionally difficult undergraduate courses, some provide support for study and learning skills by leading small-group workshops, and others work with specialized projects at the U of S. This group of students do a remarkable job at balancing their involvement within PAL at the University Learning Centre, their studies, as well as sports and hobbies.

  - ❖ *A philosophy underlying all PAL programs is to provide comfortable and safe learning environments that engage and support students in their academic pursuits*

What do Peer Mentors Gain?

❖ leadership training

❖ a strengthened sense of campus community and connectedness

❖ public speaking, tutoring and teaching skills

❖ insight into the world of higher education and innovative programming

Mission of the PAL Program

❖ offers programs, resources and services to encourage and enhance student learning at the University of Saskatchewan;

❖ creates opportunities for students, faculty, instructors, and staff to be involved in engaged learning within the university community and beyond;

❖ helps develop exceptional students, scholars, leaders, and citizens within the university community;

❖ give and receive feedback to evolve and improve the Peer Assisted Learning program, allowing it to grow and succeed within of the University of Saskatchewan.

PAL Academic Support Programs

❖ Learning Communities

❖ Structured Study Sessions

❖ Study Skills

❖ U-Speak

❖ Writing Groups

❖ Library Research Skills (NEW)

Library PAL - Peer Mentor Pilot Program

What did the Murray Library (I) want to achieve?

- Collaborate with our Learning Commons Partner (ULC) to support the mission of the PAL Program

- Support student academic success by being more innovative in our approach to how we reach students

- Build student/librarian relationships beyond the traditional roles that currently exist

Year 1

- **Start small - Recruited for 2 Peer mentors – ended up with 3**

- **5 hours a week each (some overlapping hours)**

- **2 Librarians & 1 Library Assistant working with the peer mentors**

- **Not a lot of structure**

- **Brainstorming ideas for workshops, marketing and creating promotional material**

- **Provided drop-in hours, orientations, tours, small drop-in workshops**

- **Attended a 'New Students Luncheon'**

- **Participated in a formal Library Instruction session with a librarian**

Year 1 - What we learned

- **Feedback was collected from the 3 peer mentors**

- **The Library peer mentors felt isolated from the larger ULC peer mentor group**

- **Discouraged at the lack of response from students for their services**

- **3 staff members trying to coordinate 3 peer mentors was overkill**

- **However, there was too much potential for the library to stop at a 1 year pilot**

- **Wanted to apply what we learned from the 1st year and continue the pilot program for a 2nd year**

Peer Mentors

The peer mentors supported the continuation of the program and were able to articulate the value of it.

Leah   Tim   Melanie

Year 2

- **Reduced staff coordination efforts - 1 Peer Mentor Coordinator (Virginia Wilson)**

- **Continued to provide drop-in hours, tours, orientations and participated in 'Welcome Week' activities**

- **Peer mentors led aboriginal student tours and orientations**

- **Focused more on integration with the other ULC peer mentor groups starting with the Learning Communities group**

- **Conducted three "Savvy Searching" sessions focusing on USearch, the Library's new resource discovery layer**

- **Collaborated with the ULC Writing Peer Mentors to deliver several workshops based on the Research Planner tool**

Year 2 - What we learned

- **Collaboration with the right partner is important!**
  - ❖ Collaboration with the writing peer mentors was very successful in that students don't necessarily differentiate the tasks they must do to write an essay or research paper based on who they seek help from in the Learning Commons.

  - ❖ The library research component is integral to the task and presenting it as such made sense to the students who attended the sessions.

- **A library session, even with a peer mentor conducting it, in isolation with no context does not work.**

- **Mentoring & supervisory role of the librarian is important.**

✓Successes

The concept of peer mentorship and peer learning in the library gained traction over the two year pilot project

- By second term the PALs seemed more comfortable with their roles

- Marketing and promotion improved

- The PALs had more exposure at such events as the new student orientation luncheon

- Increased attendance at scheduled sessions

- Once experiencing some successful sessions the peer mentors were insistent that the Library PM program must continue.

- The Library PMs began to feel some ownership for the program.

- Gained valuable experience instructing with a colleague, learning from each other and other student attendees, and managing a multi-faceted session in partnership with another peer mentor.

- Productive partnerships with other ULC peer mentor sections (Learning Communities, Writing Centre)

- Streamlined supervisory and mentorship structure

- Adoption of the Library PAL - Peer Mentorship program as a formal program within the library

In their own words…

Being a Library Peer Mentor allows me the opportunity to learn more about the Library at our University than the average student [… and to] teach other students these skills. Another great aspect to being a Library Peer Mentor is getting to meet many new people in the Library system at the U of S. I have learned so many new things from Virginia and Tim that hopefully I will have the opportunity to pass on to others as well.

Melanie, Peer Mentor, year two

In their own words…

The Library Peer mentor program is valuable to students because it gives them another avenue to learn about the library other than via the staff. (…) Being a peer mentor is valuable to me because I have grown in my library knowledge, my public speaking ability, and my sense of community involvement. I also value the positive feedback received from students who attended our sessions. Overall this has been a valuable experience and must continue into the future.

Tim, Peer Mentor, years one and two

? Challenges

- **Collaborating & integration with ULC Peer Mentors**
  - ❖ Reporting and structure
  - ❖ Working styles
  - ❖ Difference in levels of program focus
  - ❖ The program is already established and much of the administrative work, including recruitment each year etc... is handled by the ULC
    this is also noted as a benefit

- **Buy-in**
  - ❖ Library Administration & Staff
  - ❖ Other Faculty

- **Human Resource**
  - ❖ Time commitment
  - ❖ Librarian mentorship and involvement

- **Financial**
  - ❖ $250.00 honourarium per semester for each peer mentor
  - ❖ Minimal financial investment but there are competing demands for funds

- **Physical Space**
  - ❖ Peer Mentors need appropriate space to work
  - ❖ Growing demands on space

- **Sustaining the program**
  - ❖ It is not typically where we focus our academic support services for student success
  - ❖ Competing demands
  - ❖ Alignment with the University Library's Strategic Plan

Benefits of Peer Mentorship &Peer Learning
in the Library

For the mentors:

- ❖ Learning by teaching
- ❖ Building Leadership skills
- ❖ Developing a better knowledge of library research, resources, & services

For other students:

- ❖ Over come library anxiety
- ❖ Reduce perceived barriers
- ❖ Familiarity & convenience

For the library:

- ❖ Building relationships with students in a different way
- ❖ Provides opportunity for librarians and library staff to mentor students
- ❖ The program is already established and much of the administrative work, including recruitment each year etc... is handled by the ULC

  this is also noted as a challenge

Envisioning the Future

- **Further program integration with the other ULC Peer Mentors**

- **Exploring other opportunities:**

  ❖ Building new collaborations across campus

  ❖ Library peer mentors in 1st year success programs or 1st year introductory undergraduate classes

  ❖ Library peer mentors embedded in core courses

  ❖ Possibly rethinking the role of our student casuals

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Discussion & Questions