



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

Van Ryt, Cherry, Menzies, Victoria, & Tredinnick, Jennifer
(2015)

The QUT Training Model for Peer Leader Capacity Building.

[Working Paper]

(Unpublished)

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/83685/>

© Copyright 2015 The Authors

Notice: *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

The QUT Training Model for Peer Leader Capacity Building

Cherry Van Ryt, Victoria Menzies & Jennifer Tredinnick,
Student Success & Retention, Queensland University of Technology.

Abstract

QUT has enacted a university-wide Peer Program's Strategy which aims to improve student success and graduate outcomes. A component of this strategy is a training model providing relevant, quality-assured and timely training for all students who take on leadership roles. The training model is designed to meet the needs of the growing scale and variety of peer programs, and to recognise the multiple roles and programs in which students may be involved during their peer leader journey. The model builds peer leader capacity by offering centralised, beginning and ongoing training modules, delivered by in-house providers, covering topics which prepare students to perform their role safely, inclusively, accountably and skilfully. The model also provides efficiencies by differentiating between 'core competency' and 'program-specific' modules, thus avoiding training duplication across multiple programs, and enabling training to be individually and flexibly formatted to suit the specific and unique needs of each program.

Introduction

QUT has a long history of peer programs which, in the past, were routinely reliant on the commitment of individual champions to manage and maintain. Programs were characterised by inconsistency in quality, sustainability and access (Menzies & Nelson 2012). QUT's experience, however, supports research that the connections fostered by collaborative peer-to-peer learning opportunities outside of the formal classroom environment provided a critical foundation for a student's learning success in later years and enhanced learner satisfaction, course experience and retention.

“Peer leadership has grown because it works: research has validated the major benefits provided to the students who receive the service, the peer leaders themselves, and the institution as a whole.”¹

The development of a systematic and quality-assured university-wide approach to peer programs thus began in 2010, was framed within the university's *First Year Experience and Retention Policy* and now, four years later, a Peer Programs Strategy (PPS) is well established the university.

“QUT provides a range of programs and activities designed to support student engagement, retention and success” and ensures that “all first year students have

¹Shook, J. & Keup, J., *New Directions for Higher Education*, 157, Spring 2012 © Wiley Periodicals, Inc. Published online in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com) • DOI:10.1002/he.20002, p14.

the opportunity to engage in peer to peer activities, and is committed to facilitating peer-to-peer interactions.”²

QUT has since experienced rapid growth in the number of university-wide, faculty-based and student-club initiated peer programs, providing learning and social support to QUT students in a wide variety of face to face, virtual, one on one, group and blended roles and settings. The number of peer programs seeking and accessing training supported by the Peer Programs Strategy Team has doubled from 2013 to 2015, growing from 16 to over 30.

Underpinning the Peer Programs Strategy is a system of support and infrastructure that has been developed and refined by the QUT Peer Programs Strategy Team. Working in partnership with staff and students, a range of quality assurance systems and practices have been developed and implemented. These ensure that programs are of a consistent high standard and designed to meet learner needs, and peer leaders are appropriately trained, managed, rewarded and recognized both at an individual program level and holistically over the entirety of their peer leader journey which may span several years, several different programs and several different roles across those programs.

Developing the QUT Peer Leader Training Model

At the outset and throughout service, the training of peer leaders is of critical importance in ensuring a high quality and safe peer to peer experience for all involved.

“Peer leaders serve most effectively in the capacity as referral agent when they are provided appropriate training to refer their peers to the available campus resources and when this training regime models effective resource referral practices.”³

Training also forms part of the process of building a peer leader’s long term graduate capabilities that complements a student’s academic record. It was essential that a training model was developed that had the flexibility to embrace both shared efficiencies and program specifics, and that each training experience was fresh and relevant for participants. In this way the training can acknowledge and build upon each program’s needs, and each student’s level of skills and experience, in a logical and meaningful way. The training model also needed to respond to concerns that students had previously received ad hoc, repeat training which demeaned its value and led to disengagement. (Menzies & Nelson, 2012)

The first iteration of a university-wide approach to peer leader training involved the development of a common set of quality assured training ‘modules’ which students completed every time they joined a peer program. Modularization achieved clear operational efficiencies in content and timeliness, however this did not solve the issue of training duplication for students. Nor was it wholly supported by training providers, particularly from

² Queensland University of Technology. (2012). *Manual of policy and procedures. C/6.2 First Year Experience and Retention*. Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved February 9, 2015 from http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/?C?C_06_02.jsp

³ Shook, J. & Keup, J., Association of American Colleges and Universities. 2011. *The LEAP Vision for Learning: Outcomes, Practices, Impact, and Employers’ Views*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities. 2012, P9

Counselling Services, who advocated that certain module content and skills benefited from personalized, developmental learning processes that encouraged a richer understanding of the particular role of the peer leader within their program, rather than just the delivery of generic and universal content.

To address this, QUT further refined and trialled initiatives around the following five aspects of training provision:

- Centralization
- Modularization
- Individualized agenda design
- Distributed training responsibility
- Practical training support

Centralization

To meet this growing scale and variety of peer programs, QUT has developed and refined a streamlined and centralized training model, offering quality-assured and timely training for all students involved in a peer program at the university.

Integral to the success and relevance of the training is the recognition that peer leadership is not a one size-fits all, one-off or stand-alone experience for a student, and that a student may be involved in several programs and multiple roles during their peer leader journey. Hence the training model has been developed concurrently with, and forms a key part of, QUT's overarching 'Peer Leader Capacity Building Model' (Tredinnick, in press), in which each peer leaders' personal leadership and 'learnership' journey is fostered and guided through key phases- 'Aspiring', 'Enabling' and 'Mastering'- to develop graduate capabilities and self-efficacy. This university-wide and university-long focus is intended to benefit the peer leader personally and professionally as well as enable and enhance the quality of the support they are able to provide QUT students as program participants.

Modularization

In response to the need to balance operational efficiencies with contextualization and flexible delivery, training workshop agendas have been streamlined into manageable and interchangeable one hour modules which differentiate between:

- two key incremental stages in peer leader service- Beginning and Ongoing
- two levels of personalization- Core Competencies and Contextual training
- new peer leaders and those with prior experience

Beginning training modules are offered prior to peer leaders starting their role. Modules aim to provide students with baseline knowledge (Code of Conduct, role and responsibilities, referring, boundary setting, cultural and diversity awareness) and baseline skills (communication, peer learning facilitation) required to prepare for practice and perform their role safely, inclusively and accountably. Ongoing training modules are offered once students have a level of experience in the role. These modules follow on from and complete the formal training, providing the opportunity for relevant and meaningful reflection of practice, and extension of key skills to enable the handling of more complex peer leader service situations.

Modules are iterative, undergoing continual review and refinement by training providers and the peer programs team in response to stakeholder feedback, identified gaps in skill needs of leaders, and demands of new learning environments (e.g. virtual). The modules ensure that:

- peer leaders are trained in the skills and knowledge required to perform their role;
- the quality and currency of module content and delivery remains valid;
- there is minimal duplication of material across modules.

The premise of the core competencies modules is that this training only needs to be done once. The content of these modules is the same for all programs and can be delivered to combined and large groups if needed. These modules are also grouped at the beginning of a training workshop, usually before a break, after which any student who has previously completed these modules joins the workshop. The contextualized modules are program specific. Students are required to complete the contextualized training modules for each program they join. Training providers design and deliver a high quality experience, contextualising and personalising their sessions for each program and each peer leader role within that program, to ensure students involved in more than one program have an enriching experience of training on each occasion.

Individualized Agenda Design

Training workshop agendas are built from several one-hour long modules which can be arranged in flexible workshop formats to suit the particular peer leader role and program requirements. Five peer leader roles have been identified, here ordered in degree of role complexity- orientation leader, buddy, peer learning facilitator, adviser and mentor (Menziez, V., Tredinnick, J. & Van Ryt, C. 2015). Within each new program's planning phase the Program Coordinator prepares a 'Program Profile', a one page summary of program specifics, which training providers refer to as the basis for consultation and collaboration to gain a rich understanding of the particular role and activities of the peer leader within that program. Module content, interaction, questions and examples can then be tailored to each group maximizing the efficiency and benefit of each training opportunity.

Distributed Training Responsibility

Underlying QUT's First Year Experience & Retention Policy (FYER) is the fundamental premise that "the successful transition of our students, and retention of students is the responsibility of all staff" (QUT FYER MOPP C/6.2). All QUT staff have a shared responsibility in providing learning environments that enable students to "engage academically, socially and personally with their institution". (Nelson, Quinn, Marrington, & Clarke, 2011:2)

The availability and flexibility of internal QUT training providers is therefore a key factor in enabling peer programs to start-up and peer leaders to start providing timely academic and social support to 1st year students, and critical to the model's success. In 2014, 145 hours of beginning and ongoing peer leader training was provided by 38 internal QUT training providers. This involved significant cross-divisional contributions from Counselling, Library Services, Academic Language and Learning, Equity, the Student Engagement Team, Careers, and the Learning and Teaching Unit. The scale of training demonstrates the commitment from staff across the university to the Peer Programs Strategy and also the distributed nature

of responsibility for delivering training. As the scale of Peer Programs at QUT continues to grow, alternative training delivery methods, especially within the online environment will be necessary and are being investigated and developed. Online training will also address currently unresolved issues of equity and inclusion for external and part-time students unable to easily access peer leader training which is currently only available face to face.

Practical Training Support

Peer Programs offers centralized assistance to Program Coordinators in all aspects of event management to ensure a training workshop runs smoothly and to take the focus and workload off Program Coordinators so they can concentrate on establishing and implementing the actual programs. Personal support is available to:

- prepare agendas, invitations, flyers, and resource packs of QUT related information,
- book rooms, training providers and catering
- manage registration, attendances and workshop evaluation and
- provide peer leader training certification

Conclusion

Although at this stage of implementation, participation in this centralized model of peer programs training has not been achieved for all programs, the strategic goal is for all programs to adopt training as ‘mandatory’. The approach, with training embedded within QUT’s ‘Peer Leader Capacity Building Model’, (Tredinnick, in press) is to achieve this target through enticement rather than insistence, and so that all peer leaders at QUT can be badged as having completed recognised, high quality and highly valued peer leader training.

References

- Menzies, V., Tredinnick, J. & Van Ryt, C. (2015). Practices to enhance peer program implementation integrity to safeguard peer leaders and learners. Paper presented at *1st Students Transitions Achievement Retention & Success Conference*. Melbourne, Australia. (in press).
- Menzies, V. & Nelson, K. (2012). Enhancing student success and retention: an institution-wide strategy for peer programs. In *15th International First Year in Higher Education Conference: New Horizons*, 26-29 June 2012, Sofitel Brisbane Central, Brisbane, QLD.
- Nelson, K., Quinn, C., Marrington, A., & Clarke, J. (2011). Good practice for enhancing the engagement and success of commencing students. *Higher Education*, 63(1), 83-96. doi: 10.1007/s10734-011-9426-y.
- Queensland University of Technology. (2012). *Manual of policy and procedures. C/6.2 First Year Experience and Retention*. Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved February 9, 2015 from http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/?C?C_06_02.jsp
- Shook, J. & Keup, J., (2011). Association of American Colleges and Universities. *The LEAP Vision for Learning: Outcomes, Practices, Impact, and Employers’ Views*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Shook, J. & Keup, J., *New Directions for Higher Education*, no. 157, Spring 2012 © Wiley Periodicals, Inc. Published online in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com) • DOI:10.1002/he.20002
- Tredinnick, J., Menzies, V. & Van Ryt, C. (2015). Poster