

Notes from Peer Learning Assistant Learning Community Meeting

December 6, 2016, 3-4 PM – 508 Chemistry Bldg.

General Welcome and Introductions

Attendees: Chuck Kutal (Chemistry); Bill Dennis, Andrei Galiautdinov, Craig Weigert (Physics and Astronomy); Brad Barnes (Computer Science); Malcolm Adams, Gary Iliev, Bobby Benim (Math); Julie Luft, Logan Fiorella (Education); Norris Armstrong (Biology); Tim Burg, Cole Causey (OSE)

Fall Semester Recap – Successes and Challenges

Biology – Norris stated that implementing PLAs into his large lecture course has been a lot to manage. The program at Georgia State was mentioned regarding staffing and management of such a program. Later discussion about a permanent home for PLA management mentioned Experiential Learning as a potential location. Feedback from end-of-semester surveys is still coming in.

Computer Science – Brad spoke to the value of the bonds that had been created between students and their PLAs. Having PLAs has provided more opportunities for students to seek support, both content-specific as well as general academic advice from their PLAs. Feedback on end-of-semester survey is still coming in.

Pedagogy Training – Julie offered to write a brief summary of the experience from the first offering of BIOL3910, the pedagogy course for BIOL1107 PLAs. She emphasized the importance of equity as an aspect that PLAs need to have included in their training. Tim mentioned that some feedback from the end-of-semester ‘Satisfaction Survey’ confirmed the importance of equity in courses with PLAs. Chuck noted this as something to enhance in the FCID3100 course.

Recruitment and Staffing Updates

BIOL – Approximately 70 applications have been received, including several who are currently serving as PLAs. Norris will not have time to review the candidates until next week. Cole to provide initial review to help with this process.

MATH – 2250 has completed the selection of 12 PLAs for the six sections next semester. They will be participating in the FCID 3100 course during spring. Names have been provided so that permission is granted for registration. Approximately 45 applications were received.

CSCI – Approximately 50 applications were received. Hiring has not been finalized. Brad to provide names once PLAs have been selected so permission for registration for FCID 3100 can be granted.

PHYS1112 – We still need about 10 more PLAs to staff this course for spring. Malcolm volunteered to send the PHYS1112 application to not-selected Calculus applicants to help with this.

PHYS1211 – Four PLAs have been hired and permission has been granted for registration for FCID 3100.

Evaluation of Impact – Measurement Plans and Available Data

PHYS plans to use a concept inventory at the beginning and end of semester. MATH also plans to use an entrance survey / concept inventory that might also be administered at the conclusion of the semester. Malcolm suggested that administering concept inventories to the PLAs themselves would be able to provide additional impact data.

A ‘Satisfaction Survey’ was administered this semester for BIOL, CSCI, and ENGR students regarding their experiences with their PLA-supported course. Responses are still coming in, with over 200 completed so far. There was some discussion regarding how to better address learning outcomes rather than ‘satisfaction’. We would also like to look at more comprehensive measurements: How do students perform in subsequent courses? How do students compare courses with and without PLAs? Bill mentioned he might be able to gather some of this data, as PHYS1112 is the second in a sequence. Julie, Tim, Logan, and Cole will plan to meet prior to the break to discuss plans for measurement moving forward.

Spring Implementations

PHYS 1211 will now be a single section of ~90 students. Andrei will be implementing PLAs in this course during spring. He plans to create 4 groups within the class which would receive support from the PLAs. Suggestion from others included having Andrei rotate between the groups. This is similar to the approach that Brad uses in CSCI. Andrei plans to use Thursdays for theory and lecture, with Tuesdays including support from PLAs.

Much discussion took place regarding strategies to effectively flip the classroom. A common frustration is that students come to class unprepared, having not completed readings or watched videos, etc. Suggestions such as clicker activities and eLC quizzes were suggested as strategies to ensure materials are reviewed prior to class. Andrei mentioned his plans to include a participation element in PHYS 1211, and sought feedback on potentially using PLAs to evaluate participation. Others advised against putting PLAs in a role that included subjective evaluation. Brad discussed his use of Piazza as a discussion forum to track substantive participation.

Brad and Norris both agreed that initial implementation of PLAs requires a substantial amount of reworking approaches to instruction. This front-end investment should pay off in subsequent offerings.

For BIOL 1107, Norris is planning to use only 10 PLAs during spring. He mentioned that creating another tier for PLA participation, specifically for veteran PLAs, is something to be considered: ‘Super PLAs’.

Brad will have two sections of CSCI1301 during spring. One will use PLAs in a SCALE-UP classroom; the other will be a traditional lecture style without PLA support.

Wrap Up – Continuing the Discussion / Upcoming Events

There was discussion throughout related to improving training on the nature of the relationship PLAs are meant to have with students. Gary mentioned concern over ‘deputizing’ the PLAs, and stressed the importance of clearly establishing what is appropriate for PLAs to handle. This sentiment was echoed by others. It was mentioned that this type of training might be able to be included during an early semester module that also addressed issues such as Academic Honesty and FERPA. Perhaps an orientation meeting for PLAs across all departments is something to consider, as this is along the lines of DAE’s tutor training.

Friday, February 17th – Dr. Valerie Otero, CU Boulder – Presentation and Workshop

Craig suggested that including PLAs in part of this event would be beneficial. The format of this event is still in development.

Tuesday, March 28th – 2017 STEM Institute

Suggestions were made to potentially include representatives from Georgia State University’s LA program for insight into management structure and logistics. Chase Hagood was also mentioned as a potential contributor.