Tuesday, September 19th, 2017
PLASMA Learning Community Meeting
Peer Learning Assistants: Strategies, Management, and Application

In attendance: Naomi Norman (OVPI); Norris Armstrong, Kris Miller (Biological Sciences); Jill Beyette (Engineering); Brad Barnes (Computer Science); Andrei Galiautdinov, Craig Wiegert (Physics and Astronomy); Malcolm Adams (Mathematics); Chase Hagood (DAE); Chuck Kutal (Chemistry); Cole Causey, Tim Burg (OSE)

4:00 PM – Welcome and Program Status

Tim notified the group that the year two spending accounts have been created and have been shared with the business managers at the participating departments. Apologies were made for the delays in finalizing approval from USG. "Rollover" funds ended up not really being rollover, as they had to be factored into the year two budgets.

4:05 – Program Snapshot

Cole provided an overview of the current efforts regarding PLAs, including growth over the first three semesters of the pilot.

- STEM Courses Supported:
  - Fall 2016: 3 (BIOL1107, CSCI1301, ENGR2120)
  - Spring 2017: 7 (BIOL1107, BIOL1104, CHEM1312H/1412, CSCI1301, MATH2250, PHYS1112, PHYS1211)
  - Fall 2017: 8 (BIOL1107, BIOL1108, BCMB3100, CSCI1301, CHEM1210, MATH2250, PHYS1111, PHYS1112)
- PLAs Active:
  - Fall 2016: 27
  - Spring 2017: 60
  - Fall 2017: 76
    - *Of the current semester's PLAs, 21 are returning PLAs*
- Participating Faculty:
  - Fall 2016: 3
  - Spring 2017: 9
  - Fall 2017: 21
    - BIOL1107: Armstrong, Dees
    - BIOL1108: Pucko
    - BCMC3100: Dolan, Medlock, Sensibaugh, Robinson
    - CSCI1301: Barnes
    - CHEM1210: Ellenberger, Du, Kutal, Pienta, West
    - MATH2250: Alli, Benim, Black, Iliev, LeBlanc
    - PHYS1111: Cooley, Galiautdinov
    - PHYS1112: Dennis

- Students Supported
  - Fall 2016: 675
  - Spring 2017: 875
  - Fall 2017: ~2500
    - *Figures for Fall 2017 were taken from the Schedule of Classes seat count after drop add. Cole asks that participating faculty confirm the CRN #s associated with each PLA-supported course, particularly for the large classes that are parsed into several CRNs.*

4:15 – Pedagogy Courses Overview

Chuck Kutal provided an overview of the current status of FCID3100, a pedagogy course that serves PLAs from Chemistry, Computer Science, Mathematics, and Physics. Two sections are currently operating for fall semester with 38 PLAs.

Kris Miller provided an overview of BIOL3910, a pedagogy course designed specifically to serve PLAs in the Life Sciences courses. Two sections are currently offered serving 19 PLAs. Cole inquired into whether or not any significant changes had been made to BIOL3910 since previous semester, to which Kris mentioned that she had expanded the modules on equity and diversity as a result of feedback from the PLAs.

There was discussion about the pros and cons of offering discipline specific versus non-discipline-specific pedagogy training to the PLAs, with benefits and drawbacks to each approach. Also mentioned was the need to think about how to scale these courses if the program demands it. A question was posed as to whether or not it could be taught by graduate students, to which the consensus was positive so long as the graduate students themselves are well versed in the PLA program and pedagogical concepts.

4:30 – Departmental Overviews

Chemistry: Chuck Kutal provided an update on efforts in Chemistry. Beginning fall 2017, PLAs are supporting six sections of CHEM1210 in SCALE-UP classrooms. Five faculty members are participating, each with at least two PLAs attending the lecture meetings. These PLAs are enrolled in the FCID3100 pedagogy course. In addition to the pedagogy credit, CHEM PLAs enroll in a 2 hour practicum course. CHEM3700 was created for PLAs who support lab sections. This course was recently approved for experiential learning status. CHEM 3710 was created for PLAs in lecture based CHEM courses.

Mathematics – Malcolm Adams provided an update on efforts in Mathematics. For MATH2250, the same model as spring semester is largely being deployed. PLAs support the intensive model of 2250 which meets five times per week. These are also small classes of 19. PLAs typically attend two sessions, leading one of them. Three faculty members in Mathematics are using PLAs for the first time this semester. In addition to the small-class-size intensive sections of 2250, Kelly Black is also teaching a SCALE-UP section supported by a PLA. Malcolm noted that sections of 1113 precalculus also use undergraduate peer mentors, although they do not receive any formal pedagogy training.

Physics – Craig Wiegert and Andrei Galiautdinov represented Physics and Astronomy during this meeting. Dr. G and Bill Dennis are using PLAs for the second semester, with BJ Cooley starting this

semester. All of the Physics courses are of the large lecture format. PLAs for Physics are enrolled in the FCID 3100 course. Starting this semester, the Physics and Astronomy switched to a compensation model wherein only returning PLAs are paid. First time PLAs are not paid, but receive course credit for their participation in FCID 3100. Craig noted that something that will need to be addressed as the program continues is a better way to create a community among the PLAs.

Computer Science – Brad Barnes provided updates on efforts in Computer Science. Starting this semester, Brad is deploying PLAs in both of his sections, including one class in the SCALE-UP environment as well as another in a large lecture format. To address the challenges of offering PLA support in the large lecture format, Brad has devised a zig-zag style seating arrangement so that the instructional team can navigate the space and have access to all students. The instructional model for both of Brads courses is the same, with group based active learning and a fully flipped delivery. Brad noted that there has been interest in PLA support for CSCI1302.

Biology – Norris Armstrong and Kris Miller represented Biological Sciences. Starting fall semester, PLA support is deployed in BIOL1107, BIOL 1108, and BCMB 3100. Kris noted that the pedagogy course was made optional for the BCMB 3100 PLAs. While more courses and sections are being supported by PLAs, the ratio of PLAs to students has changed, most noticeably in the larger courses, with a ratio of ~ 1:80. Norris noted that the recruitment period may have started too early in advance of this semester, with many students inquiring about the position after arrangements had been settled.

4:45 – Goals of the PLA program and Learning Community

Two main objectives were identified. The first is the need to identify methods to gather better resolution in terms of quantitative data. While DFW percentages are being captured, it is difficult to attribute any changes to the PLA treatment. We need to consider what might be possible to measure, even if it's just a single Learning Outcome, to compare between PLA-supported courses and non-PLA-supported courses. Chase suggested that we might capture same-semester performance for other courses for students who are enrolled in a PLA-supported course.

The second objective discussed was how to best leverage the Learning Community. What do we want to get out of these meetings? How can we serve faculty who wish to begin implementing PLAs in their classrooms. There was discussion of potentially leveraging CTL's Maymester program to create a primer for new adopters.

Two members of the group will be travelling to Boulder this fall to attend the International Learning Assistant Alliance Conference:
Norris Armstrong – Biological Sciences
Jill Beyette – College of Engineering

5:00 – Adjourn

Cole will send a poll with potential dates and times for the October PLASMA meeting.