

# Peer Facilitators in PBL Courses



*Institute for Transforming  
Undergraduate Education*

*University of Delaware*



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# Session Overview

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- **Introduction**
- **Why use undergraduate peer group facilitators?**
- **Elements of the peer facilitator program**
- **Sample *Tutorial Methods* session**
- **Evaluation**
- **Concluding comments/Q & A**



# What Are Peer Facilitators?

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**Undergraduates who guide student groups in PBL or active learning classrooms**

**They work alongside the faculty instructor**



# **Environments**

## **In Which Peer Facilitators Are Used**

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- **Small and large classes**
- **Majors and non-majors courses**
- **Introductory and advanced subjects**
- **Basic and applied sciences, humanities, social sciences**



# Peer Facilitator Models

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**Roving versus dedicated**

- 2-3 groups of 4 students each, versus
- single group of up to 6 students

**Experienced versus new PBLer**

**Peer versus near-peer**



# Characteristics of a Functional Tutor

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- **Active member of the group**
- **Involves all students**
- **Questions/probes the thinking and reasoning processes**
- **Provides information when appropriate**
- **Promotes use of appropriate resources**
- **Guides/directs/intervenes to keep the group on track**
- **Flexibility**
- **Sets high standards**
- **Supports good interpersonal relationships**
- **Models good feedback**
- **Has a finely tuned “b.s.” detector**

From, University of New Mexico Primary Care Curriculum,  
*A Guide to Quality Tutorials*



# Peer Facilitator Model

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## Facilitator training important

- Development of questioning skills
- Group dynamics
- Resource guide



# Activities of the Peer Facilitators

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**Enroll in Tutorial Methods of Instruction**

— 2-credit course

**Work with one or more PBL groups in class**

**Meet weekly with the course instructor**

**Meet with group(s) outside of class (optional)**

*No involvement in grading*





# **Tutorial Methods of Instruction: A Two Credit In-Service Course**

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- **Intellectual development of undergraduates**
- **Learning styles**
- **Group dynamics and group process**
- **Dealing with conflict**
- **Techniques of questioning for deeper levels of understanding**
- **Peer, self and group assessment**
- **Ethical issues**
- **Reflective processing of the experience**



# Tutorial Methods Class Session

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- **Structured discussion of readings**
- **Interactive exercises**
- **“Fish bowl” tutoring, followed by reflective processing**
- **Reflections on the tutoring experience**
- **Teaching case studies**



## **Activity: Common Group Situations**

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**What situations do facilitators encounter the most frequently?**

*Choose up to five of the situations on the handout to answer this question.*

**What situations do facilitators find to be the most challenging?**

*Pick one of the five you selected above*



# **I Want to Be In My Professor's Group**

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**Describe the situation in this group -  
What are the major issues?**

**How should the peer facilitator handle  
this situation?**



# Videotape Credits

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**Author: Jessica Horvath**

**Director: Nancy King**

**Producers: Deborah Allen & Harold White**

**Student Actors: Michelle Lyons, Crystal Mack,  
Sarah McCarron & Eric Moskal**



# Methods of Feedback & Evaluation

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- **Students of their facilitators**
- **Peer facilitators of students in their groups**
- **Students and facilitators of the PBL course**
- **Facilitators of the *Tutorial Methods* course**
- **Ongoing verbal feedback**

# The Facilitator Experience

*1-strongly agree ----> 5-strongly disagree*

<b>I feel that I have benefited from the process of being a facilitator.</b>	<b>1.3 ± 0.1</b>
<b>I think that understanding of my major field of study has improved as the result of being a facilitator.</b>	<b>*2.1 ± 0.2</b>
<b>I think that my interest in incorporating teaching into some aspect of my professional career has been enhanced by this experience.</b>	<b>1.9 ± 0.1</b>
<b>I think that the facilitator experience has helped me to better understand the way I and other people think and learn.</b>	<b>1.2 ± 0.1</b>
<b>I would recommend the facilitator experience to others.</b>	<b>1.4 ± 0.1</b>



# End of Course Ratings from Biology

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**Overall rating of the peer tutor**

**$1.3 \pm 0.04$**

1 - excellent → 5 - poor

**Working with a peer tutor has been  
beneficial to my learning of biology**

**$1.3 \pm 0.04$**

**If given the choice, I would take  
another class designed like this one**

**$1.5 \pm 0.07$**

1 - strongly agree → 5 - strongly disagree





## What Students Say:

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“I have become more *comfortable* talking in a group and presenting my information confidently. I can talk easily with everyone in my group and look forward to coming to class because of the environment \_\_\_\_\_ has created.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ always provides a *comfortable* atmosphere where I feel as if I can contribute ideas and opinions and not be looked upon as dumb or wrong.”



## What Students Say (cont.)

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“\_\_\_\_\_ prompts me to think instead of just giving me the answers.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ has taught me that only when you can explain something do you truly understand it.”

“This is a very good atmosphere, most susceptible for learning. I’m quite sure that PBL is best for me, and \_\_\_\_\_ has helped to get us accustomed to the format of the class.”



# Effect of Facilitators on Attendance

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**Attendance before facilitators: 91.1%**

**Attendance after facilitators: 94.1%**

**(32% reduction in absences)**

**Allen & White (2001). In, *Student-Assisted Teaching*,  
Miller, Groccia & Miller, Eds. Bolton, MA: Anchor.**



# Effect of Facilitators on Effort

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**Hours before facilitators: 4.8 per week**

**Hours after facilitators: 6.0 per week**

**(25% increase in time spent on course  
work outside of class)**

**Allen & White (2001). In, *Student-Assisted Teaching*,  
Miller, Groccia & Miller, Eds. Bolton, MA: Anchor.**

# Why Use Peer Facilitators?

## A Multilayered Learning Community With Benefits To:

### Students

- help with passive ----> active transition
- view to path ahead

### Instructors

- managing multiple groups
- use of complex problems
- foster positive group process
- provide feedback

### Facilitators

- final overview of discipline
- view to path ahead
- mentoring by instructor