The Peer-Led Team Learning Workshop Model

Traditional instruction in introductory science courses relies primarily on the lecture, a method of presentation and demonstration by an expert to a group of listeners. Although many good purposes can be served, the lecture/recitation method has limitations that are directly related to the lack of student involvement. The Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) model preserves the lecture and introduces a new structure, a weekly two-hour workshop where students interact to solve carefully structured problems under the guidance of a peer leader. The peer leader is a student who has done well in the course previously. The PLTL Workshop provides an active, participatory learning experience for students, creates a leadership role for undergraduates and engages faculty in a creative new dimension of teaching.

In a typical workshop, six to eight students work as a team to solve carefully structured problems. The peer leader clarifies goals, ensures that team members engage with the materials and with each other, builds commitment and confidence, and encourages debate and discussion. A good leader keeps the group focused on seeking, construction, testing, and evaluating solutions to the problems and avoids the announcements of answers that short-circuit thought processes.

The peer-leader is central to the model. A good leader liberates students to take responsibility for their own learning and focuses their efforts on negotiating meaning and constructing individual understanding. The leaders need to learn to do their jobs. Faculty and learning specialists need to be closely involved in teaching the leaders in special leader training sessions.

Each workshop is built around a set of problems and activities designed by the faculty member to focus on central ideas to help the students attain the course goals. The workshop environment is unique and invites faculty to rethink traditional problems. The Effective Workshops invite students to work together and model effective problem-solving tactics. The results of the PLTL Workshop are quite clear: students achieve better grades; retention improves; students like the PLTL Workshop.

The PLTL model is robust and has been successfully introduced in two and four year colleges and research universities. Although the model is most well-developed for chemistry, it has also been successfully implemented in biology, physics, math and computer science courses.

Participants will:

- Learn the theory and practice of the PLTL model
- Experience workshop and leader training activities
- Analyze barriers to implementation
- Make connections to potential mentors and allies