Peer Advocates in First-Year Composition Undergraduate Mentors as Agents of Engagement

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Origins

- NIU Retention Summit, November 2013
- First-Year Composition (FYC) Retention Summit, January 2014
- Funded by President and Provost a week later
  - $600/semester scholarship for peer advocates (PAs)
  - $100/semester stipend for cooperating teachers
  - 18 mentors in new TA-taught FYC classes by week 4 spring semester
- Strong support from other NIU campus offices
  - Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning
  - Office of Assessment Services
  - Office of Student Academic Success
  - Given lots of publicity!
- Pilot continued into 2014-15 Academic Year
- 30 PAs and more advanced teachers involved
Peer Advocates: Roles and Activities

- Attend class once/week on average; front-loaded
  - Join class community
  - Create and facilitate relationships with students
- Help students become engaged at NIU
  - Advertise events
  - Advise on class projects
  - Be a mentor
- Research and present on NIU resources
  - Research Rookies; Model U.N. ResTech; Latino Resource Center; Public Safety, etc.
  - Ensure Student Success through use of resources
- Internships
  - Almost half chose internship credit
  - Projects individualized and vary greatly: media coordinator, interviews for qualitative research, cohort coordinator, etc.
Peer Advocates: Support

- 3 cohorts, each consisting of 3 teams
- Each led by a Cohort Coordinator
  - Cohort Coordinators are students with advanced peer mentoring experience
  - Coordinators have increased obligations and responsibilities reflected in internship designation for the position
  - Directly impact the development of the program
- Coordinated by a faculty member
- Weekly meetings
  - Discuss progress, strategies, challenges, issues
  - Training (diversity workshop)
  - Presentations on campus resources
  - Workshop problems and solutions
Peer Advocates: Benefits

- Advertise campus resources
- Demonstrate NIU commitment to student success
- Serve as a resource for class work
- Serve as a liaison to help resolve issues and problems
- Help students become connected to NIU
- Coordinate the Freshmen Freeze: a freshmen-focused event to help build community membership while promoting awareness of local issues (Huskie Food Pantry)
Peer Advocates: Results

• Organization and training serves as a model for other peer mentoring programs
  o Small team support
  o Peer-led large team support
  o Weekly resource training and planning sessions
  o Use of social media to coordinate and promote events
  o Use of reflections and surveys to assess and continue development of the program

• Professionalization of Peer Advocates
  o Gain experience working with faculty
  o Work Independently and creatively
  o Opportunity to design and complete an internship related to their field of study [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgMO68ZaLRc video made by Peer Advocate for internship]
First-Year Composition Peer Advocate Program Evaluation

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Peer Advocate Program Goals

- Program goals
  1. Promote connection to campus life
  2. Promote student learning (perceived and actual)
  3. Promote retention
Research Questions

• Research Questions:
  1. What is the impact of the PA program on students’ connection to NIU?
  2. What is the impact of the PA program on student learning (writing scores, grades, academic standing)?
  3. What is the impact of the PA program on students’ retention from fall 2014 to spring 2015?
  4. What did students say about the program?
What data was collected?

- Pre-post survey
  - Overall support
  - Self-reported learning
  - Connection to NIU
  - Use of resources
  - Goal commitment
  - PA relationship quality
  - PA support
- Writing scores (final e-portfolio project)
- Retention (fall to spring)
- Demographics
- Grades, ACT, GPA
What data was collected?

• Overall support
  o 3 items answered on a 1 to 5 likert scale ($\alpha=.75$)
    1. I have had access to the support I need to be successful in this course.
    2. I have had access to the support I need to be successful at NIU.
    3. What I learned in this course will help me be successful in the future.
What data was collected?

• Self-reported learning
  o 3 items answered on a 1 to 5 likert scale (α = .89)
    1. My writing skills have improved significantly this semester.
    2. This course has helped me to develop my critical thinking and analysis skills.
    3. This course has prepared me to write effectively in my future course work.

• Self-reported connection to NIU
  o 5 items answered on a 1 to 5 likert scale (α = .87)
    1. I feel involved in campus life at NIU.
    2. I am glad to be a student at NIU.
    3. I feel good about my decision to come to NIU.
    4. I intend to finish my degree here at NIU.
    5. I feel a sense of belonging to the campus community.
What data was collected?

• Academic resource use
  o 5 items answered on a yes/no response format
    1. I have used the University Writing Center at least once this semester.
    2. I have used MAPWorks at least once this semester.
    3. I have used the Academic Advising Center at least once this semester.
    4. I have visited the instructor during office hours (not including required conferences) at least once this semester.
    5. I have attended an NIU lecture (outside of class) by an outside speaker at least once this semester.
What data was collected?

• Extra-curricular resource use
  o 9 items answered on a yes/no response format
    1. I have been involved with Intramural sports/Sports Club at least once this semester.
    2. I am a member of a Fraternity/Sorority.
    3. I have been involved with a Student Organization at least once this semester.
    4. I have attended an NIU sporting event at least once this semester.
    5. I have attended an NIU music, art, or drama event at least once this semester.
    6. I have visited an NIU museum exhibit at least once this semester.
    7. I have visited Career Services at least once this semester.
    8. I have visited one of NIU’s resource centers (e.g. Asian, Latino, Gender & Sexuality, Disability) at least once this semester.
    9. I have visited the Student Involvement & Leadership Development (SILD) office at least once this semester.
What data was collected?

• Goal commitment
  o 6 items answered on a 1 to 5 likert scale ($\alpha = .78$)
    1. I take this goal seriously.
    2. It’s realistic for me to expect to reach this goal.
    3. Quite frankly, I don’t care if I achieve this goal or not.
    4. I am strongly committed to achieving this goal.
    5. It wouldn’t take much for me to abandon this goal.
    6. I think this is a good goal to shoot for.
What data was collected?

- PA Relationship quality (peer advocate sections only)
  - 7 items answered on a 1 to 5 likert scale ($\alpha=.94$)
    1. I get along well with the peer advocate for my section.
    2. I can confide in my peer advocate.
    3. I have a lot of respect for my peer advocate.
    4. My peer advocate takes a personal interest in my success.
    5. I am very satisfied with the relationship my peer advocate and I have developed.
    6. The mentoring relationship between my peer advocate and I was effective.
    7. My peer advocate and I benefited from the mentoring relationship.
What data was collected?

• PA support (peer advocate sections only)
  o 5 items answered on a 1 to 5 likert scale (α=.94)
    1. I can share problems with my peer advocate.
    2. My peer advocate has helped me to be successful in this course.
    3. The peer advocate for my section has been very helpful to me.
    4. My peer advocate has helped me to identify resources that are
       available on campus.
    5. My peer advocate has helped me to become more knowledgeable
       about NIU.
Results - Sample

- 1712 enrolled in English 103
  - 427 presurveys and 495 postsurveys
    - 606 students in PA sections
      - 253 PA presurveys and 297 PA postsurveys
## Results-Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Fall 2014 Sample (PA group) N=606</th>
<th>Total Pop (Engl 103) N=1712</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Program-College</th>
<th>Fall 2014 Sample (PA group) N=606</th>
<th>Total Pop (Engl 103) N=1712</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health and Human Sciences</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual and Performing Arts</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Results - Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2014 Sample (PA group) N=606</th>
<th>Total Pop (Engl 103) N=1712</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACT</strong></td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>22.17</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GPA</strong></td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Freshman</strong></td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
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## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>(PA group-POST) N=303</th>
<th>(non-PA group-POST) N=206</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Learning</td>
<td>4.06*</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Support</td>
<td>4.17**</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIU Connection</td>
<td>3.80*</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading self-efficacy</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math self-efficacy</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Academic Resources (0-5)</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Extra-curricular Resources (0-9)</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal commitment</td>
<td>4.37*</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA Relationship Quality</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA Support</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *=p<.05; **=p<.01
### Results – Actual Learning

- **Actual Learning**
  (E-Portfolio scoring rubric)

- Six criteria rated on a scale of 1-4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience &amp; Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Writer demonstrates thorough understanding of audience and task while using a compelling voice and style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus &amp; Development</strong></td>
<td>Writer clarifies major aims, arranges material to support those aims, and may show insight into problematic or provocative aspects of the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis</strong></td>
<td>Writer carefully and consistently evaluates the relevance of contexts, rhetorical strategies, and/or credibility of sources when presenting a position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source Integration</strong></td>
<td>Writer understands and elegantly articulates his/her ideas as they relate to those of others and effectively integrates source material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Format &amp; Editing</strong></td>
<td>Writer shows mature command of format conventions and sentence level features of written language (grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong></td>
<td>Writer evaluates growth, describes composing processes in detail, and cites compelling evidence within portfolio.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(PA group-POST)</th>
<th>(non-PA group-POST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-portfolio writing scores (Actual Learning) (N=152)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(N=123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience and Purpose</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus and Development</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Integration</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format and Editing</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td><strong>2.46</strong>*</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall composite</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Term GPA</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cumulative GPA</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible to Enroll</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grades (percent A’s)</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
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**Note.** *=p<.05
# Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>(PA group-PRE) N=156</th>
<th>(PA group-POST) N=156</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Learning</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>4.08**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Support</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIU Connection</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>3.86**</td>
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<td>Reading self-efficacy</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math self-efficacy</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal commitment</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.36</td>
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Note. *=p<.05; **=p<.01
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>(non-PA group-PRE) N=44</th>
<th>(non-PA group-POST) N=44</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Learning</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Support</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>3.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIU Connection</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading self-efficacy</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>4.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math self-efficacy</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal commitment</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *=p<.05; **=p<.01
Results – Retention

Fall to spring retention rate (as of 1/27/15)

- Overall (Engl 103) - 86%
  - Non-PA group - 86.3% (Avg. hours =12.37)
  - PA group - 85.3% (Avg. hours =12.24)
• 81% students believed that the PA program and PAs were helpful.

  o “since my professor was new, she didn't know a lot of specifics about campus resources or things going on, so my peer advocate was able to step in and answer any questions we had”

  o “Getting help on assignments the peer advocate has done already so he/she could help me better understand.”
PA program feedback-22 PAs

• 100 % peer advocates held positive opinions about the program.
  o “Gaining leadership and communication experience”
  o “I feel as though I have helped my freshmen students not make the same mistakes that I had made my first year. Being a peer advocate demonstrates to students that you don't have to be afraid of getting involved. I have gained a lot of experience with people and I hope that my students have gained a lot from presence in and out of the classroom”
  o “Meeting new people and creating connections with others”
  o “The network of the other Peer Advocates.”
  o “I learned how to be a voice of support for students and help them in the best way I can”
  o “Getting an opportunity to help students and having them come to me for help”
PA program feedback-17 Instructors

• 82 % instructors held positive opinions about the program.
  
  o “I found it most beneficial to have someone with better knowledge of NIU’s campus and resources to share those resources with students. It was also good to have someone to relay students' sense of the classroom and course to me”

  o “The Peer Advocate was able to connect to students on their level and offer resources that I didn't even know about”
Discussion

- Students in the PA group reported higher levels of self-reported learning

- Students in the PA group rated higher in actual learning (scored higher in reflections)

- Students in the PA group reported higher levels of overall support.
Next Steps

- We will continue to collect the data and run analyses as this program continues in the fall 2015.
Achievement Motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Robbins et al., 2004)
- Students who are motivated to achieve success are more likely to stay.

Academic Self-Efficacy (Robbins et al., 2004)
- Students who feel that they are able to reach their academic goals are likely to stay.

Academic Goals (Robbins et al., 2004)
- Students who appreciate the value of education and are committed to obtaining a degree are more likely to stay.

Involvement in campus life (Astin, 1985; Kuh & Pike, 2005)
- Students who have invested psychosocial and physical energy and want to see a return on that investment are likely to stay.

Perceptions of support from the university (Tinto, 1993)
- Students who perceive and have access to university support are likely to stay.
Belongingness (Hausmann, Schofield, Woods, 2007)
- People who feel connected, feel like they belong
- Have a network of support in the NIU community
- Behavioral intentions (e.g., Ajzen, 1985; 1991; 1975)
  - Theory of Planned behavior
    - Behavioral intentions tend to be a strong predictor of actual behavior