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### Adventure-Based Training to Enhance Peer Mentor Effectiveness

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**Adventure-Based Training to Enhance Peer Mentor Effectiveness**

A report submitted to Dr. Chad Bebee, Director of Assessment

July 1, 2023 by

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## **Introduction**

Multiple literature studies, including previous research conducted by our program, have shown the effectiveness of peer mentor programs in first-year experience courses (Rieske & Benjamin, 2015; Smith, 2008; Topper, 1998). While this literature emphasizes the positive impact of peer mentor programs, it also discusses the need for more comprehensive training in order for peer mentors to truly be effective (Holt & Fifer, 2018). Adventure based learning has been shown to be an effective way to build leadership skills, enhance self-efficacy, and increase confidence (Doering, 2006, Noe, 2017 as cited by Marasi, 2019). While there has not been a lot of research conducted on the use of adventure-based learning for training of peer mentors, we believe that incorporating adventure-based learning will help us impart these skills on our peer mentors and therefore improve our training and increase their effectiveness.

## **Study Description**

Our study sought to test the effectiveness of an enhanced and adventure-based training program on our peer mentor program. Each year we have gathered feedback and data from our peer mentors. Through this data we saw a need for enhanced training meant to improve team cohesion and engagement in the classroom. This past year we both improved our current training procedures and implemented new aspects of training. These new aspects included an adventure-based team building day at the beginning of the semester. During this day we met at a lake and focused on team building, setting goals, and leadership development. We also introduced an adventure-based retreat midway through the semester which focused on communication, classroom engagement, team building, and recognition. We also ended the semester with a wrap up event meant to provide reflection and closure.

We collected data throughout the semester in order to conduct our mixed-methods analysis. Fourteen of our class leaders participated in two focus groups, one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. In addition to these focus groups, we also observed all class leaders in the classroom twice and conducted focus groups with both instructors and students. We then added survey results to our qualitative data to create a thorough picture of the impact of this training.

## **Key Findings**

We analyzed all the data we collected and compiled it into a few main findings. First, we found that our training increased team cohesion and confidence for class leaders while in their groups. These themes were prevalent in all results of our data and were particularly emphasized by the class leaders themselves during both of their focus groups. Furthermore, we found that class leaders were increasing their participation in their classroom activities as supported by results from the focus groups and classroom observations (see Table 1 for observation results). In addition to reports from the class leaders, we also gathered survey and focus group data from students. This data showed that with our new training model the Class Leaders continued to be a helpful resource on campus and provide connection and engagement with the university. The student survey showed a high correlation for items such as “my class leader has been influential in my decision to return to UNC in the Spring semester” and “My class leader helped me believe in my ability to be successful as a student.” These findings continue to prove the effectiveness of

our peer mentor program and further showed how the implementation of our new training program enhanced the experience of our peer mentors and our UNIV 101 students.

In addition to these positive findings, we also discovered specific areas to attend to in future trainings. Both the instructor and Class Leader focus groups highlighted the fact that our class leaders still felt unsure of how to interact in class and that instructors were unsure of their class leader's role in the classroom. The focus groups both indicated a need for further training in the classroom and more intentional effort to connect class leaders and their instructors. What we discovered is that while our training improved Class Leader cohesion and confidence when they worked together, we needed to do more to improve their confidence when they are in the classroom on their own.

### **Future Directions**

The results of our study are being applied directly to a second grant that we have received to continue improving our training. We are planning to keep the training additions we implemented last year including the beginning of the semester, adventure-based team building day and the mid semester retreat. We plan to use this information to help us further improve our training by focusing on class leader behavior in the classroom and intentional connection between class leaders and their instructors. We have begun to create new lesson plans to help the class leaders participate in the classroom more while also being clearer on their roles. We have also made an effort to include more class leaders in the training of our instructors to provide more examples for how to utilize a class leader in the classroom. Furthermore, we have created intentional opportunities for our class leaders to connect with their instructors including team building activities and adventure-based metaphors at our first spring training and inviting instructors to participate in our class leader team building day. We plan to again collect data throughout the semester and present this data to a national conference and submit a manuscript detailing our research.

### **Sharing and Using the Results**

This assessment grant allowed us to improve and expand our training program. Furthermore, it led to a presentation at a national conference (i.e., The Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience, Feb 2023) and a manuscript that is in the process of being submitted. In addition, this grant led directly to a second grant award for this year in which we plan to further improve our training program based on our study results.

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**Table 1**

*Paired Samples T-Tests for 16 Rubric Items (Week 3 and Week 13)*

Items	<i>M</i> Diff	<i>SD</i>	95% <i>CI</i> Diff		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Hedges' g</i>	Top 6
			Lower	Upper				
Information delivery								
Pair 1 - CL added their own examples or experiences to aid student learning throughout the class.	0.18	1.07	-0.44	0.79	0.63	.271	1.13	
Pair 2 - Examples shared by CL were relevant to the overall purpose of the class.	0.34	0.61	-0.02	0.69	2.04	.031	0.65	3
Pair 3 - CL was knowledgeable about the topic.	0.21	0.70	-0.19	0.62	1.15	.136	0.74	
Pair 4 - CL had an appropriate level of confidence or efficacy in sharing information.	0.07	0.43	-0.18	0.32	0.62	.274	0.46	
Interpersonal presence								
Pair 5 - CL engaged with students before class/ welcomed them into class.	0.12	0.87	-0.38	0.62	0.52	.306	0.93	
Pair 6 - CL assisted and participated in class activities.	0.46	0.57	0.13	0.79	3.05	.005	0.61	1
Pair 7 - CL responded to students appropriately.	0.14	0.53	-0.17	0.45	1.00	.168	0.57	
Pair 8 - CL and Instructor had a positive working relationship.	0.07	0.27	-0.08	0.23	1.00	.168	0.28	
Communication skills								
Pair 9 - CL was listening to students carefully (verbal and nonverbal attending skills).	0.13	0.19	0.02	0.23	2.46	.014	0.20	6
Pair 10 - CL maintains good eye contact.	0.07	0.27	-0.08	0.23	1.00	.168	0.28	
Pair 11 - CL uses clear and audible voice.	0.07	0.27	-0.08	0.23	1.00	.168	0.28	
Pair 12 - CL is able to effectively articulate their ideas.	0.18	0.67	-0.21	0.56	1.00	.168	0.71	
Professionalism								
Pair 13 - CL was prepared and ready to start on time.	0.28	0.60	-0.07	0.63	1.73	.050	0.64	4
Pair 14 - CL was actively engaged in class.	0.21	0.43	-0.03	0.46	1.88	.041	0.45	5
Pair 15 - CL understood their role in the classroom.	0.11	0.40	-0.12	0.34	1.00	.168	0.43	
Pair 16 - CL presented in an appropriate physical manner (dress, posture, positioning).	0.36	0.50	0.07	0.64	2.69	.009	0.53	2