The student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years.

— Alexander Astin, researcher and author
CHAPTER 1

What Is a Peer Educator?

For the purpose of this text, peer educators are defined as tutors, Supplemental Instruction leaders, academic mentors, and similar student leaders who provide academic support and enhancement at the postsecondary level. Peer educators tend to work in student learning or academic assistance centers, tutoring or writing centers, developmental studies departments, or other educational support programs in two-year or four-year colleges and universities. Typically, peer educators are undergraduate students, though at some institutions graduate students, staff members, or professional tutors lead academic assistance sessions.

Peer educators lead tutorial sessions, either one-on-one or in small groups, or in course-based sessions. Course-based sessions refer to regular discussion/homework/review sessions for students enrolled in targeted sections of courses. Models of course-based assistance include Supplemental Instruction, Peer-Led Team Learning, Peer-Assisted Study Sessions, Structured Learning Assistance, Peer Assistance Learning, and comparable programs. At many institutions, peer educators provide a major, and sometimes the only, component of academic assistance for the undergraduate student body.

Role of a Peer Educator

As you probably recall, the academic expectations of students at the postsecondary level differ greatly from the expectations of students still in high school. In elementary through high school, adults (teachers and administrators) are responsible for the education of children (students). On the other hand, at the postsecondary level, students are considered to be independent adults responsible for their education. As adults, students register for their courses and decide whether to go to class and whether to complete schoolwork. Additionally, students in college receive their final grades as well as the bill for their education.

This transition from education as a “child” to education as an “adult” can be daunting for students, especially for traditionally aged students who move directly from high school to college. A major role of the peer educator is to guide students from dependent, “childlike” learning that they were accustomed to in high school toward more independent, “adultlike” learning that is expected of them in college.

The term pedagogy refers to instruction of students as “children”; the term andragogy refers to instruction centering on students as “adults.” Malcolm Knowles (1980) summarized key differences between pedagogical and andragogical learning. These differences form a basis for describing a peer educator’s role, which is to guide the college student from learning as a child (pedagogy) toward learning as an adult (andragogy). Figure 1.1 summarizes key differences between pedagogical and andragogical approaches toward instruction.
FIGURE 1.1 Pedagogy versus andragogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pedagogy: learning as a child</th>
<th>Andragogy: learning as an adult</th>
<th>Examples for peer educators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-concept</strong></td>
<td>Students are dependent on instructors to manage learning.</td>
<td>Students are independent and self-directed. Instructors guide students toward assuming responsibility for their learning.</td>
<td>Students bring at least one question to each session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience</strong></td>
<td>Students have narrow ranges of experiences. Students receive information from the experienced instructors.</td>
<td>Students have wider ranges of academic and personal experiences, which are valuable resources in a learning setting.</td>
<td>Students supply examples that explain a concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Readiness for learning</strong></td>
<td>Instructors employ standard, step-by-step curricula based on students’ developmental readiness according to age and grade.</td>
<td>Students’ social and career interests determine content. Instructors include relevant, real-life activities, as well as social interaction.</td>
<td>Pairs of students work together on an activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation toward learning</strong></td>
<td>Students acquire knowledge for future use. Instruction is organized according to subject and difficulty levels.</td>
<td>Students expect learning to be for current use. Instruction includes problem-centered content and higher-level thinking.</td>
<td>Leader presents a complicated, multi-step problem that students solve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation to learn</strong></td>
<td>Students are motivated by external rewards and punishments.</td>
<td>Students are motivated by curiosity and internal incentives to improve and master the content.</td>
<td>At the end of a session, students identify what they learned and what they need to improve on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ACTIVITY 1.1

ANDRAGOGY AND PEER ASSISTANCE

A goal of peer assistance at the postsecondary level is to develop independent, responsible, lifelong learners. To maximize the success of students with whom they work, peer educators should incorporate the five components of...
FACILITATOR OF LEARNING

A major responsibility of peer educators is to assist students with how to learn college-level content. Skillful peer educators employ techniques that show students how to understand and remember difficult subject matter. As such, peer educators guide or facilitate students’ learning.

Bear in mind that peer educators do not present themselves as experts on the subject matter or as substitute teachers or professors. In the peer educator role, it is quite acceptable to be unsure of an answer or to tell students, “I don’t know.” However, as a facilitator of learning, it is crucial that you guide students regarding how to solve the problem or how to find the needed information.

PEER EDUCATOR’S ROLE AND DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS

Your responsibility to guide students toward more independent, “adultlike” learning refers to all students, regardless of age. Though older, nontraditional students tend to be more physically and emotionally mature and more focused on career choices, they still approach college-level academics with many of the same needs as do traditional 18- to 22-year-old students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Arthur Chickering (1993) created a universal model describing the psychosocial development of college students. This model consists of seven vectors, each highlighting an area of affective, social, intellectual, or personal development (see Figure 1.2, left-hand column). As a framework explaining college students’ evolving behaviors and attitudes, Chickering’s model is useful in your peer educator role. Note that the seven vectors do overlap and are not linear in nature. Students progress through the vectors with varying speeds, directions, and amounts.

In Figure 1.2, the right-hand column contains examples of how you, the peer educator, can boost the development, competence, and confidence of students in your academic support sessions. Each of these items is clarified within the chapters of this book. As a concluding activity in Chapter 9, you will be directed back to Figure 1.2 with the purpose of adding other examples.

ACTIVITY 1.1 Continued

andragogy, or adult learning, as listed in Figure 1.1, under the column Andragogy: learning as an adult.

1. Read the examples listed in the far right column. Then, add other examples of how peer educators can incorporate each of the five components.

2. Explain each example to another peer educator. Have either of you observed this strategy?
### FIGURE 1.2 Student development and peer educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ psychosocial development</th>
<th>Examples of peer educators’ role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chickering’s vectors (1993)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. Developing intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence | • Actively involve each student in your sessions.  
• Call on students by name, and wait for them to answer questions.  
• You are viewed as a “model student”; therefore, pass on recommended learning and study behaviors to students.  
• Provide regular feedback to students to increase their sense of competence and confidence with course work. |
| 2. Managing emotions | • Provide plenty of reassurance for both novice and returning students.  
• Incorporate anxiety-reducing techniques in your sessions.  
• Encourage students to develop a supportive network of family and friends.  
• Refer students who seem overly anxious, angry, or depressed to the campus counseling center. |
| 3. Moving through autonomy toward interdependence | • Suggest that students organize their own study group for difficult courses.  
• Let students know that you expect them to complete homework and attempt problems before attending your session.  
• In your sessions, have students figure out answers to questions and problems. Provide opportunities for students to assist others.  
• Show students how to monitor their own learning and performance in courses. |
| 4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships | • For group and course-based sessions, periodically direct students to sit beside and introduce themselves to a person they don’t know.  
• Incorporate collaborative activities; periodically mix up groupings so that students are working with different people. (Females more than males tend to welcome collaborative activities.)  
• Create a welcoming and comfortable setting in your sessions.  
• Do not tolerate sexist, racist, or other bigoted comments in your sessions. |
| 5. Establishing self-identity | • Showcase those behaviors and attitudes that are related to success.  
• Encourage students to assess personal weaknesses and areas of improvement, and then encourage them to seek advice about how to improve.  
• Encourage students to provide personal examples when explaining concepts. |

*Continued*
6. Developing purpose

- Work with students on setting personal goals.
- Relate subject matter to individual career goals.
- Refer students who are undecided about a major or career to the campus career services office.

7. Developing integrity

- Incorporate activities requiring higher-level thinking and reasoning skills, such as defending points of view or providing evidence supporting an opinion.
- Call attention to the personal satisfaction that comes with mastering a subject and understanding content thoroughly.
- Have students review their individual and collective accomplishments.
- Direct students to evaluate the working group’s productivity and members’ contributions.

Benefits for You, the Peer Educator

Most peer educators regard their positions as more than just another campus job. Through your work as a peer educator, you likely will gain academic, social, and career-related skills and rewards. For instance, you probably will improve your abilities to make decisions, think through complex issues, and solve a variety of problems. As with others in this position, your communication and leadership skills will grow, as will your feelings of accomplishment and self-confidence. In addition, you will be working cooperatively with other people, including those with differing backgrounds; this will be invaluable in professional settings. Moreover, your work might help you to define your career path. Comments from experienced peer educators underscore the benefits and rewards of this position:

Being a tutor helped me to organize my thoughts and aided in my interpersonal relations. I’ve been able to relearn content that I forgot and to improve my study skills.

After conducting group sessions this past year, I feel much more confident in leading others and am proud that I was able to help so many students.

Furthermore, peer educators’ varied job experiences often have a substantial and positive impact on how they view the institution for which they work. As with many peer educators, your work experiences might strengthen the bond you have with your college or university.

My role as a peer educator has dramatically changed my experience at this university. The interaction with professors has been enlightening, motivating, and confidence building.

I love working as a tutor. I learn so much from the students I work with. Plus, this job has helped me become a part of the campus community. I can’t imagine campus life without it!
In conclusion, as a peer educator, you will experience the powerful impact that you can have on others and the many rewards of meaningful work.

When I see that look of understanding on a student’s face, I consider that a success. I get excited every time someone says, “Oh, my gosh; now I see!”

One particular topic—aerobic respiration—is very hard for students to understand. I have a special way to present the topic so that everyone understands. I feel like I can see the light bulbs switching on. Wow—it amazes me that I can have that kind of power and effect!

As I leave this position, I realize what an incredible experience it has been. Although frustrating at times, being an SI leader has been enjoyable and rewarding. I am so thankful for this opportunity.

ACTIVITY 1.2

INTERVIEWING

Interview an experienced peer educator, using the following questions. Share your interview answers with others who are training for peer educator positions.

1. Describe examples of how your experiences working as a peer educator have affected your:
   • Intellectual abilities or academic performance.
   • Personal and leadership skills.
   • Social and communication skills.
   • Professional or workplace skills.

2. In what ways have your experiences as a peer educator influenced your career decisions, options for graduate school, or other aspects of your future?

3. Describe one experience as a peer educator that stands out in your mind. Why is this incidence significant to you?

Learning Strategy: Managing Your Time

Managing one's time is a fundamental element of developing into a responsible, successful, adult-like learner. As a peer educator, you will work with many students, especially first-year students, who have little experience with how to structure their days and balance academic and leisure activities effectively. Poor time management results in missed assignments, sloppy work, procrastination, rushed activities, and a great deal of stress. In your sessions, emphasize to students the importance of organizing their time, including the use of daily to-do lists, weekly schedules, and semester calendars, either written or electronic.
**ACTIVITY 1.3**

**ASSESS YOUR TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

For each item, A–L, place an “x” in the column that most accurately describes you.

**FIGURE 1.3 Time management assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>I remember what assignments are due for each course each week.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>I get adequate amount of sleep each night (usually 7–9 hours).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>I have assignments, quiz and test dates, appointments, meetings, work hours, and activities written in a central location.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>I know important semester dates: class starting and ending dates; semester breaks; midterm and final exam periods; and deadlines for add/drop, course withdrawal, financial aid, and payment of bills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>I take breaks when studying and then get back to work immediately.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>I prioritize what I need to accomplish each day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>I know when and where my classes meet; available times to eat, exercise, and do chores; work hours; and open time slots for study.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>Once I start a task, I complete it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>I am not confused about course responsibilities and requirements.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.</td>
<td>I complete assignments, papers, and projects in a timely manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
<td>I feel in control of how I manage my time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>I successfully balance academic requirements, personal responsibilities, and leisure activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Column totals:**

**Total score:**
ACTIVITY 1.3  Continued

DIRECTIONS FOR SCORING

**Column totals.** For each column, add the number of x’s. Then, multiply this sum by the number at the top of the column. Write your total for each of the four columns.

**Total score.** Add the four column totals. Write this sum beside “Total score.”

**Interpreting your score.** Your total score will be between 12 and 48. Your total score generally represents how adept and self-directed you are about managing your time.

---

**FIGURE 1.4 Interpreting your time-management score**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A total score of</th>
<th>Represents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36–48</td>
<td>You skillfully manage your time. What are three strategies that help you to manage your time effectively? Share your approaches with your peers, especially those scoring between 12 and 35.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24–35</td>
<td>You have some, but not enough, control over your time. You need to adjust and add different time-management strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–23</td>
<td>You do not have control of your time. To accomplish more while lowering your stress, implement new time-management strategies. Consider seeking assistance from peers, an advisor, or learning assistance center.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING TIME MANAGEMENT**

Refer to the items in A–L on the time-management assessment; pay attention to items that you marked “rarely” or “sometimes” (columns one and two). Next, examine the following recommended strategies associated with these items.

1. Use a calendar to keep track of semester dates and deadlines. → Items C, D, K, L
2. Make a daily list—either written or electronic—of what you want to accomplish. Prioritize the tasks. After completing a task, cross it off. → Items A, B, E, F, H, I, J, K, L
3. Use a planner to organize and keep track of your academic, personal, and social obligations and responsibilities. → Items A, B, C, D, E, F, G, I, J, K, L
4. Use a weekly block schedule to create a visual overview of committed and available time each week. Begin by filling in classes, labs, work, and other commitments. Then, find blocks of time available for personal activities (eat, sleep, exercise, family responsibilities, and chores) and social or leisure activities. → Items B, E, G, J, K, L
SETTING GOALS

Personal goals provide a means by which to change or refine behaviors and are useful when working with students over a period of time. As you read through chapters in this text, create goals that will increase your proficiency in the dual roles of college student and peer educator. When creating a personal goal, you are much more likely to be successful if you incorporate these seven elements:

1. **Be specific about what you will accomplish.** The most common error is for students to make very general goal statements, which are ineffective when changing behaviors. For example, the goal “I will add more study time” is very broad—this student could study ten added minutes and still complete the goal!

2. **Be realistic about your goal.** If you identify a goal that you are unlikely to accomplish, you are setting yourself up for failure. For instance, the student who created the goal “I will study 90 minutes in the library every evening” probably will not study in the library Friday and Saturday evenings. Be honest with yourself; create a practical goal that you likely can complete.

3. **Have a time constraint.** Develop a goal with a beginning and ending time. Change happens in small steps; therefore, make your goal short term—a week is a manageable amount of time to try out a goal and works well for peer educators meeting with students on a weekly basis. Here’s an example of a goal that is specific, realistic, and with a manageable time constraint:

   “I will review my history lecture notes immediately after the class on M/W/F of this week.”

4. **Write down your goal.** You are much more likely to complete your goal if you write it down and keep it in an accessible location. It is too easy to forget about or change goals that are not in print. In peer assistance sessions, direct students to write goals on individual index cards or on a poster board for group goal statements.

5. **Say your goal out loud.** Recite your goal statement to yourself or, better yet, to another person. The act of saying and hearing your goal will help to solidify your intention to follow through. In a peer assistance setting, arrange for students to say their goal aloud to one another in small group sessions or to you in an individual session.

6. **Follow up regarding your level of success.** At the end of the designated time period, immediately evaluate how successful you were. Reflect as to whether you will continue this strategy or if you need to refine or change the strategy. As a peer educator, take the time during sessions for students to evaluate themselves and share commentaries with others.

7. **Include another person.** Tell your goal to another person and let that person know about your level of success. If another person knows about your goal, you are more likely to follow through with your intentions. Given that peer assistance sessions consist of the leader plus one or more students, you readily can incorporate this element into your sessions.
ACTIVITY 1.4

PERSONAL GOAL

If you scored between 12 and 35 on the time-management assessment, you should improve how you manage your time. In particular, make adjustments for those items that you indicated you do “rarely” or “sometimes.” To strengthen your time-management skills, create a short-term goal centered on what you will do this week. Complete the following sentence.

This week I will:

Tell another person(s) your goal. Ask that person to evaluate your goal, using the seven elements of an effective goal. Be sure to revisit your goal in one week and assess how effective it was in improving your time management.

1. Is the goal specific?
2. Is the goal realistic?
3. Do you have a time constraint?
4. Is the goal written?
5. Did you say the goal out loud?
6. After one week, did you evaluate your level of success?
7. Who else knows about your goal and your level of success?

ACTIVITY 1.5

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer each question below; be specific, descriptive, and thorough. Afterward, compare your current answers with your answers from the opening activity. Are your current answers more accurate and comprehensive than your answers before reading the chapter? Are your current answers clear and comprehensive enough to use as an explanation for someone who has not read the chapter and knows little about the topic? Discuss your answers with other peer educators.

1. What is a peer educator?
2. What is the role of a peer educator?
3. What personal benefits can I expect from working as a peer educator?
4. Summarize your expectations of your peer educator role. List any questions or concerns that you have at this point about the peer educator position.
5. Describe how you can manage your time more effectively.
6. What are the seven key elements of a successful personal goal?
ACTIVITY 1.6

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PEER-LED SESSIONS

Each text chapter includes components that facilitate learning for you, the reader. These components mirror techniques that facilitate learning for students with whom you work. Therefore, be mindful of assorted chapter features that parallel elements of effective peer-led sessions.

The purpose of this activity is to focus your attention on select features in Chapter 1 that assist with learning. In Figure 1.5, elements of effective peer-led sessions are listed in the left-hand column. Test your understanding of these elements by providing an example from Chapter 1, as indicated in the right-hand column.

FIGURE 1.5 Elements of effective peer-led sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer educators should</th>
<th>Elements within Chapter 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide an opening activity that previews the session or introduces the topics.</td>
<td>The opening questions focus readers' attention on main topics and highlight what readers should learn in the chapter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate learning and study strategies within the session.</td>
<td>Add an example from Chapter 1:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide choices for the learner.</td>
<td>Add an example from Chapter 1:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break down material. Focus on one chunk of information at a time.</td>
<td>Add an example from Chapter 1:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide application of content.</td>
<td>Readers complete a goal-setting exercise. Add another example from Chapter 1:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include periodic opportunities for students to check their understanding of a topic.</td>
<td>Readers check understanding of content via activities interspersed in chapter. Add another example from Chapter 1:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a closing activity that summarizes the session and/or previews the next session.</td>
<td>Add an example from Chapter 1:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suggestions from Experienced Peer Educators

HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE LEARNING AND STUDY STRATEGIES?

Direct students to refer to both the text and class notes for answers to questions. Ask them to highlight answers. This reinforces the importance of reviewing information and finding answers in the sources they already have. Also, this helps focus their attention on examples and terms needed to understand problem areas. (Rick L.)

Before leaving their session, each student has to come up with a goal for using a study strategy. Students write their goal on a sheet of large paper, which I hang in the tutoring room. It’s amazing to watch the students read about each other’s goals for the week. (Lorenza K.)

I use a combination of activities with the students, reinforcing various learning strategies. For example, students complete worksheets to take home and use as study guides. To help them prepare for the NCLEX, we do sample application questions. We do a lot of practice with reading multiple choice questions and choosing answers since nursing exams are almost always multiple choice. (Breanne D.)

References


