Peer Led Team Learning for Chemistry 111 is Chem 191. NEW Chem 290 PLTL for Organic this fall! Thanks to the support of USF Arts & Sciences we now have a 1-unit Pass/Fail course for eight sections of 10 students each. Dr. Joe Leonetti, USF ‘90, Project Leader at Genentech, is adjunct professor running the sections and training leaders for the workshops with Kim Rutledge of the Learning Center.

LEADER REFLECTIONS: FIRST PLTL SESSION
by Danielle Sisler

1. Be sure to arrive to your session about twenty minutes early. This gives you enough time to set up the tables and prepare for the workshop. I arrived early and was able to look over the problems once more, just to feel a little more comfortable. Plus, many of your students will most likely arrive early as well, just as mine did.

2. I highly recommend bringing food for the students. I brought two boxes of cookies (M&M sugar cookies and of course, chocolate chip cookies), and everybody really loved them! At first they were hesitant to take any, but after I encouraged them to have as much as they wanted (and ate one myself), they dug right in. It’s not difficult to do, and everyone really seemed to appreciate the gesture. I also recommend asking the students if they would like to switch off bringing food, because when I did it, most of them seemed happy to do it.

3. I recommend doing introductions and an ice-breaker. At first, my group was a little timid. But once I got the group laughing and enjoying each other’s company, they seemed much more comfortable around each other. Because we started forming bonds (pun intended!) and friendships immediately, everyone seemed much more willing to talk and ask questions.

4. Don’t forget to take care of business! Although icebreakers, food, and chemistry can all be very fun, it is also important to complete the ‘business’ aspect of this first session. By this, I mean the attendance sheet, the contracts, the rules/goals for the semester, briefly explaining other learning resources available at USF (LWC, chemistry tutors, office hours, etc.), checking that they have their self-tests completed, and etc. This doesn’t take very long, but is a necessary step!

5. Don’t be nervous! I was nervous going into the session, but I shortly realized that there was really no need to be. The students were really kind and respectful, and seemed even more nervous than myself. Luckily, we were able to get past this nervous feeling soon after the session began.

6. Try to make sure that every person in the group is following what we are doing. Double check that each student understands the problem at hand before continuing on to the next one. In many cases, a student might feel embarrassed to ask for further explanation, but understanding the material is essential. These sessions will not be of much help if a student is more confused after it is over.

7. Try to have fun! I know that chemistry should be the main concern in these workshops, but that doesn’t mean it has to be completely boring! Time management should also be put into consideration, but I had fun with my students, and we got a lot accomplished in two hours.
Be a PLTL Leader by Morgan Campbell (on what to say for recruiting new leaders)

Congratulations! If you are reading this, you successfully completed Chem 111/113 with an A or A-. You put a lot of hard work into learning the basic chemistry concepts present in the course and those concepts with continue to be important throughout your upper division work. If you are trying to decide whether or not to become a PLTL leader for the year, I urge you to apply. The PLTL leader position has significant personal advantages.

The first perk of becoming a leader is the constant re-exposure to basic chemistry material. This will help you immensely in organic chemistry, biochemistry, or environmental chemistry. I have no doubt in my mind that working as a PLTL leader has provided me with a deeper understanding of chemical principles and raised my grade in my upper division course work.

As a PLTL leader, you will have the opportunity to receive training in leadership and teaching that is incredibly valuable. By participating in the PLTL trainings I feel that I have improved on my speaking skills, gained leadership experience, and gained tips to be more successful in my own coursework from the Learning and Writing Center.

As a PLTL leader, you will have the opportunity to help first-year chemistry students. Being able to see the "lightbulb" click on in their heads is a rewarding experience in itself. Your dedication to helping other students, increased leadership skills, and deeper chemistry understanding are all things that will vastly improve your resume and undergraduate experience.

(3) Don’t be overbearing in trying to establish group dynamics; this will occur naturally. The tutees in my first session were particularly quiet. I had to work hard to utilize the round-robin technique. I’m expecting that they will warm up to each other, and to me, after having spent more time together. In particular, I had somewhat of a language barrier with two of the students I was tutoring, and one of them, was particularly quiet. I tried to make the student act as a recorder on the board, but her weaknesses with English became apparent; luckily, I think she has the strongest intuition for chemistry in my group, so I was able to gear her board-writing towards mathematical expressions so that she could participate without embarrassment.

(4) Bring food, but you may want to bring a variety of snacks (Nobody likes bagels!) I brought a dozen fresh bagels and some cream cheese for my tutees to eat while we worked, but no one seemed interested, which was fine with me; I’ve been eating bagels for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I’m going to bring snacks again next week, but I think bringing a variety is smarter.

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Another significant perk of participating in PLTL, it the friendships you form with your fellow leaders. Working with them week after week expands your network within the sciences. Developing new friendships with a mixture of students gives you the opportunity to ask for study tips, concept clarification, and just vent about your own academics.

Finally, as a PLTL leader, you have the ability to help first-year chemistry students. Being able to see the "lightbulb" click on in their heads is a rewarding experience in itself. Your dedication to helping other students, increased leadership skills, and deeper chemistry understanding are all things that will vastly improve your resume and undergraduate experience.

by Jordan Nelson

My first workshop went swimmingly, but there were a few things I realized in and immediately before the first session (some I should have anticipated; others I could not):

(1) Show up early (~20-30 min early!) to give yourself time to settle down and prepare. I arrived only about 5 minutes early, which is when I told my tutees to show up. My room was locked and my ID couldn’t open it so I had to run to the LWC and back to use Kim’s card. By the time the room was opened, all of my tutees were already waiting at the door, which made me feel flustered and unprofessional.

(2) Don’t feel pressured to finish the all of the work in the workshop. I initially was trying to rush through the work with my group so that we could summarize later and answer questions at the end, but I quickly realized that it was much more effective to field questions as they arose, and to not worry about rushing through the material. The students had many questions that were not related to the work at all (class format, chemical nomenclature, teacher idiosyncrasies, test preparation, etc.).

(3) Don’t be overbearing in trying to establish group dynamics; this will occur naturally. The tutees in my first session were particularly quiet. I had to work hard to utilize the round-robin technique. I’m expecting that they will warm up to each other, and to me, after having spent more time together. In particular, I had somewhat of a language barrier with two of the students I was tutoring, and one of them, was particularly quiet. I tried to make the student act as a recorder on the board, but her weaknesses with English became apparent; luckily, I think she has the strongest intuition for chemistry in my group, so I was able to gear her board-writing towards mathematical expressions so that she could participate without embarrassment.

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by Eva Brayfindley

Getting to the session early is super important. I got there about 15 minutes early, and I had just barely set up the table and gotten my stuff out and ready for the session when the first students got there. Just having those few minutes to prepare in the classroom made it go a lot more smoothly, because I had everything set up and ready to go when the students walked in.

It was also good to bring a snack (I brought goldfish) and we talked some about what we can do about bringing food in the future because our group is held right around dinner time. People were more comfortable with each other once they were eating something, so that was good.

Start off the session in a light, fun mood. The first thing we did was watch a little video about some elements on the periodic table.
table to get them laughing. After that, we did the human knot game, which got us all close to each other before we even knew each other’s names. It helped the students to get more comfortable with each other in fun way so that they would be comfortable with each other when they sat down to work on the worksheet.

It’s important that the students know that you don’t have all the answers. At the beginning of the session, the students would look to me every time they suggested an idea as to how to solve a problem to get the okay from me. I let them know it wasn’t going to work like that; my job was to get them to talk to each other about how to solve something, not to tell them the solution. Once they got deeper into the worksheet, they looked to each other for ideas and didn’t try to double check each step with me. Once they started looking to each other, they started talking more and I could tell that some of them understood it better when someone in their own class helped explain it.

by Ronnie Kuwahara

I feel like my first session went really well. I arrived about 10 minutes early and set up the tables and one of my students had already arrived. Unfortunately not all of my students were able to make it, because of other obligations. Because of this I didn’t do as many icebreakers, because I’m going to have to do some more this sunday to introduce the new students. I also brought cupcakes, which everyone seemed to like and I think that doing that helped to make them less apprehensive around me. Everyone seemed to be relatively comfortable with each other. I expected that everyone would have some reservations about speaking out loud, but they all were more outgoing than I thought they would be. Most of the students seemed to have a pretty good grasp on the material we went over.

Because I kept the icebreakers short, we were able to get through all of the problems. I was very pleased with that. I tried a few different techniques with them including: round-robin, group discussion, individual explanation, etc. I like to have the students explain to me how to do the problems sometimes, because I think that it shows whether or not they are grasping the topic. Everyone was willing to participate a pretty equal amount. One of the students is a bit more shy, but I think that with time that will diminish. I gave them my number, in case they have questions outside of the sessions and some of them have texted me for help. Overall, I was really pleased with the way that the session went and I think that it was a great start to the program.

by Taylor Neff

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