

WOMAN 1: In addition to the relationship with an instructor or mentor, as you mentioned, it sounds like the relationship to peers is extremely important. You spoke a little bit about peer leadership in the course. Do you have any suggestions about how to implement peer leadership?

MAN: Yeah, certainly. Peer leadership now is becoming more and more common in these courses. And the first thing you have to do, is you have to establish a process for identifying peer leaders, for recruiting them. And a way to do that is to set criteria for what you want the peer leaders to be able to do. Would they have to be second-year, third-year, fourth-year students? Do they have to have a certain grade point average? Do they have to have been involved in certain campus activities? You gotta have criteria.

And then you have to have some kind of training and development program for peer leaders. And what we recommend most strongly, is that peer leaders be given course credit. That they be given credit for a course that they take before becoming a peer leader. A course in interpersonal communications, group dynamics, the psychology of group dynamics, principles of self management. There are any number of possible courses from disciplines like management, communication, education, sociology, psychology. So that the students are learning a body of information-- knowledge, skills, practice-- that then they use as a peer leader.

We recommend that the peer leaders be trained simultaneously with the instructors. That they be involved in as many of the decisions as possible about course content and evaluation. And that they be given actual leadership roles for the presentation of instructional materials in the class. We recommend that you heavily recruit your honor students for these roles. And we all have outstanding honor students who very much want to help other students.

Students love helping other students. They will volunteering in great numbers to do this.

WOMAN 2: One strategy for identifying a core group of peer leaders is to look at students who are already orientation leaders. And if they meet the criteria that you set for being peer leaders in your first-year seminar, they can help students connect pre-term orientation and the first year of seminars. So they are able to have that follow through with students that's really valuable.

One other bit of information that I think it's important for everyone to know, is that the experience of being a peer leader is a powerful experience for the peer leaders themselves. It

is easily just as powerful for them as it is for first-year students. It helps a lot of peer leaders know that, in fact, they want to be in college and university instructors. Something that they may have never considered.

Finally, I think it's important for you to find a way to make your peer leaders accountable to the process. In my experience in using peer leaders, they're not all equal. Some are extraordinary, some are OK, and some may not be satisfactory. But you do have to make them accountable to the process. And generally that means giving them some sort of grade for their service as a peer leader. But it is one of the most powerful things you can do to really change, in fact I would say transform, your course for the better.

MAN: In addition, of course, to awarding course credit for peer leaders, a number of institutions pay peer leaders. And this is very acceptable. If you do that, it's very important for the peer leader to have a job description, to treat this as a form of employment, and to have a formal evaluation process.

A couple of other ways to get peer leaders, one ask yourself campus faculty to nominate outstanding students for this role. Another way would be to ask the Student Government Association to nominate student leaders. You're not going to have any shortage of nominations.

One challenge we should mention to you, if you launch a peer leader initiative as part of your college success course, is, unfortunately, you're going to have an underrepresentation of men. We see this all over the country. Men are less likely to volunteer for this role. And we're so thankful for the women students that we have that want to do this and thrive on this. But I think it takes an additional recruitment and reach out strategy to motivate and explain to the men why this would be good for them and their development as well as the students. We're seeing this virtually every campus that we look at, this underrepresentation of men. We have to do something about this.