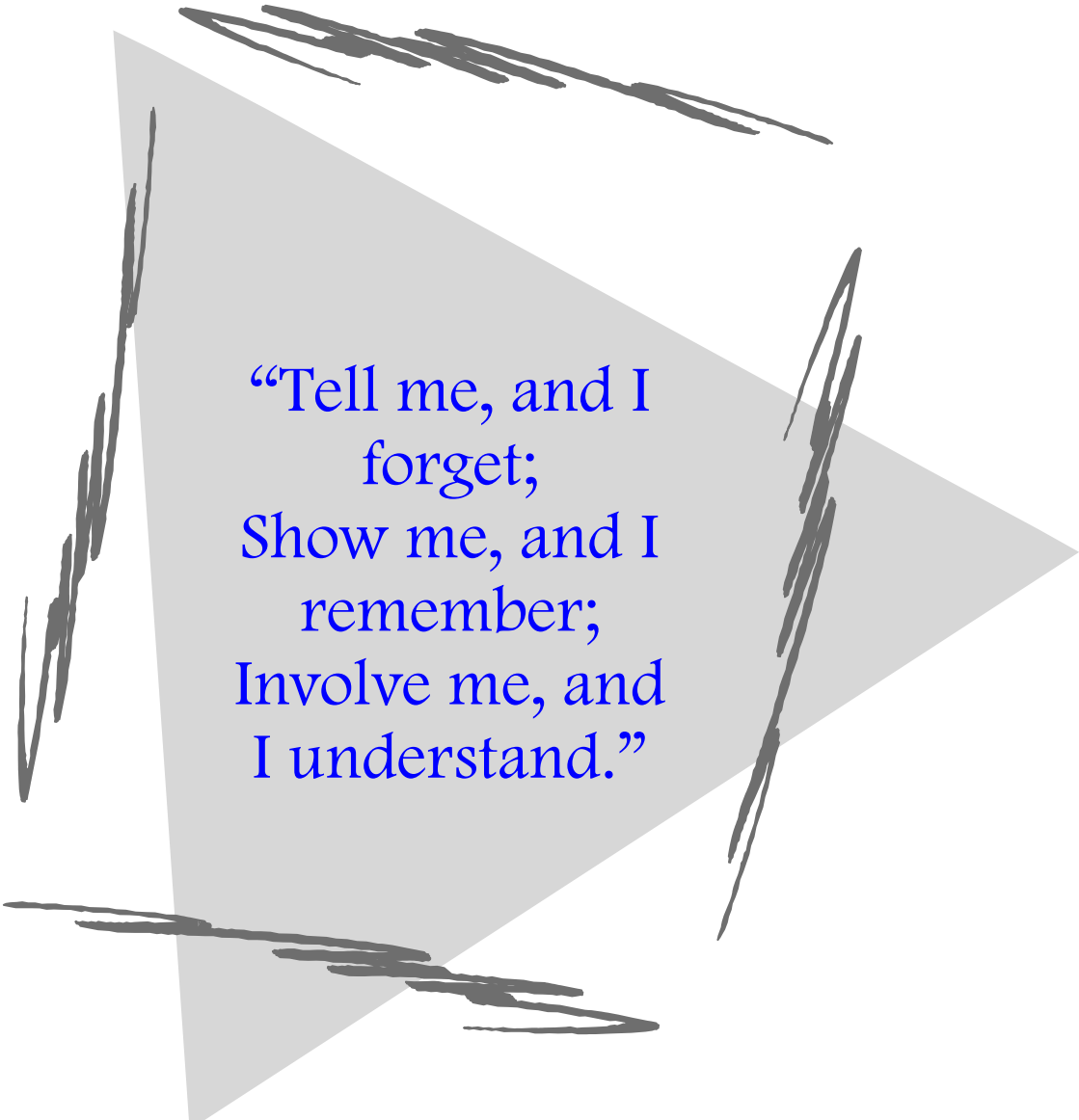


Peer-Assisted Learning Faculty Handbook



“Tell me, and I
forget;
Show me, and I
remember;
Involve me, and
I understand.”

<http://www.monmouth.edu/pal>

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History of Peer-Assisted Learning

The Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) model is a peer-facilitated academic assistance program that was originally developed by Dr. Deanna Martin in 1973 at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, with the overall goal of identifying and supporting the most challenging courses for students. PAL integrates how to learn with what to learn, incorporating collaborative learning strategies with course content. Because of its proven success in increasing student performance and retention, PAL is now offered at over 1,500 academic institutions around the world. Studies show that students who attend PAL sessions earn statistically higher final course grades than those students who do not attend, even among students who are under-prepared when they enter the course (Congos, Langsam, & Schoeps, 1997).

What Makes Peer-Assisted Learning Different?

- **PAL Targets Subjects Rather Than Students**

The PAL model targets traditionally difficult academic subjects—those that have a high rate of D or F grades and withdrawals—and provides regularly scheduled, out-of-class, peer-facilitated study sessions. PAL does not identify high-risk students, but rather identifies historically difficult classes, thereby avoiding a remedial stigma. While all students may not take advantage of the voluntary service, it attracts an equal proportion of students from differing ability and cultural groups. Participating students receive higher measures of academic achievement in comparison to their nonparticipating counterparts.

- **PAL Sessions Are Peer-Facilitated**

An PAL leader is a student who has already done well in the targeted course and is recommended by the professor to facilitate the PAL sessions. The PAL leader neither re-lectures nor introduces new material; instead the PAL leader's responsibility is to organize and add structure to the PAL sessions, allowing students the opportunity to engage in their own learning. The PAL leader typically attends all class sessions, takes notes, and reads all assigned material for the target course, as well as conducts two PAL sessions per week. The PAL leader is presented to the class as a model student with a mastery of the discipline. PAL leaders attend a mandatory two-day training prior to the start of the semester and meet with the PAL coordinator for evaluation regularly throughout the semester.

How Does Peer-Assisted Learning Differ from Tutoring?

For all intents and purposes, PAL leaders *are* tutors. Both are peer students, playing the role of model student, exemplifying effective classroom behavior and modeling appropriate study skills. While tutoring sessions are usually one-on-one, PAL sessions can be best described as “super group tutoring” wherein the PAL leader facilitates collaborative learning techniques. The goal of both PAL and tutoring is to help students become independent learners. Both PAL and tutoring are important forms of academic assistance.

There are, however, some important distinctions between PAL and tutoring. It is important to stress that one type of academic assistance is not better than another. Some students may prefer individual tutoring over PAL and vice versa. We believe students greatly benefit from a learning environment that offers a cafeteria-style selection of academic assistance. The mainstay of such a learning environment would be centralized tutoring (one-on-one appointments and walk-in services) with the inclusion of PAL-supported courses and online support, as well as academic counseling and a variety of study skills workshops. Developing such a learning environment allows students the opportunity to pick and choose the amount and level of help they feel they need depending on the course.

Is PAL Simply a Test Preparation Study Group?

No. While some students may attend PAL prior to an exam, national data suggests that students who regularly attend PAL improve their class standing by one-half to one whole letter grade. With this understanding, PAL leaders constantly promote PAL as guaranteed study time, encouraging students to participate in PAL on a weekly basis.

What Goes on During PAL Sessions?

A typical PAL session is an hour-long meeting which might include a review of lecture and assigned readings, group work and discussion, problem-solving and critical thinking activities, or a mock exam. The PAL leader’s primary focus is to assist students in understanding the course material while helping them to develop effective study skills that are applicable to the content. The PAL leaders will never structure PAL sessions as a forum to re-lecture to students who missed class.

Top Ten Positive Outcomes and Benefits of Peer-Assisted Learning

- Students earn higher subject grades while they learn effective study skills.
- PAL provides an opportunity for students to develop relationships with other students and staff, an important factor in retention.
- PAL places the responsibility of learning with the students.
- PAL helps to develop self confidence and independence in students.
- PAL is proactive and participatory rather than reactive and passive.
- PAL provides peer collaborative learning experiences which promote assimilation into the campus culture.
- PAL improves communication skills.
- PAL accommodates various learning styles.
- PAL provides students with team work experiences.
- PAL enjoys a non-remedial image while offering academic support to all students enrolled in historically difficult subjects.

Faculty Member Involvement and Cooperation

PAL is not intended to create additional work for faculty. You can support PAL by granting time for occasional in-class announcements and be supportive of the program by encouraging students to take advantage of PAL. Faculty should avoid the suggestion that only those who do poorly will benefit. Additionally, we will be in contact with you about the following aspects of the program:

- Recommend candidates for PAL leaders for your subject;

The Faculty Member Should Agree to Cooperate with the Following:

1. The PAL leader will attend class as often as possible. In addition, the PAL coordinator might also attend some class sessions with the PAL leader at the beginning of the term.
2. The PAL leader will occasionally be given a few minutes at the beginning of class to initiate and make announcements about the PAL program.
3. The faculty member may ask to be given the names of students who do or do not attend PAL sessions.
4. The PAL leader and faculty member meet on a regular basis during the faculty member's office hours.
5. The faculty member is encouraged to share reactions to the PAL program—oral or written.

What Should I Expect from the PAL Leader?

The PAL leader will maintain a professional attitude about matters such as class standards, grades, and student complaints; discourage students from attending PAL as a substitute for class; share PAL materials with the cooperating faculty member before use, if possible; and provide feedback to the cooperating faculty member if requested to do so.

The PAL program will:

- on recommendation of faculty, select candidates for PAL leaders;
- train all PAL leaders according to established guidelines and standards;
- monitor the activities and presentations of PAL leaders for as long as necessary by helping plan sessions and supervising their performance;
- provide supplies, training, and consultations for PAL leaders;
- provide cooperating faculty with an end-of-term comparative analysis of student performance.

The Peer-Assisted Learning Model

PAL Administration—trained professionals responsible for identifying targeted courses, gaining faculty support, selecting and training PAL leaders, and evaluating not only the PAL leaders but the overall program as well.

Faculty—instructors from identified targeted courses invite and approve of PAL support for their classes. PAL faculty screen PAL leaders for course competency and approve candidate selections. Faculty members also reinforce PAL program support, advocating this academic assistance to all students.

PAL Leaders—students deemed course competent, approved by the instructor, and trained in proactive learning and study skills strategies. A key component of the PAL model is utilization of peer students (as opposed to TAs or GAs) for this position; doing so negates possible inference linking PAL with final course grading

Students—the voluntary and anonymous participants in the PAL sessions and—although mentioned last—*the* most crucial component of PAL.

Note: PAL leaders are mandated to keep faculty involved in the PAL program with weekly meetings. The purpose of these visits is to inform faculty of questions students are asking about particular content, point out areas where the students are struggling, discuss the level of class participation, and offer faculty advance review of study aids, such as mock exams.

What Is the PAL Leader NOT Permitted to Do?

The PAL leader is NOT available for grading exams or papers, or to proctor exams. As a rule, we request that you not ask PAL leaders to run copies and errands or to distribute exams, graded papers, and other class literature. It's important for the PAL leader to maintain his/her peer status among the students in the class. PAL leaders are paid to attend class, keep up with the material, and run study group sessions. PAL leaders typically do not answer questions you ask the class; they are not there as a student. The PAL leader is in class to get a better sense of the areas emphasized during lectures so that they can design and develop more focused PAL sessions.

Peer-Assisted Learning Leader Line of Communication

The PAL leader should report to the PAL Coordinator for the following:

- Hiring and related paperwork
- Payroll
- Training
- Evaluation
- Planning sessions
- Handling difficult students
- Absence
- Group attendance
- Resources
- Facilities issues

The PAL leader should report to the faculty member for the following:

- Course syllabus
- Textbook information
- Instructor goals / expectations
- Questions about class material
- Planning sessions
- Handling difficult students
- Absence

Peer-Assisted Learning Contact Information

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Center for Student Success
Rebecca Stafford Student Center, Lower Level

**The information contained in this handbook has been developed with permission from materials provided by the University of Missouri - Kansas City.*