

SHUMaths Peer-Assisted Learning Project

(Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Science)



Background

Students on the BSc Mathematics programme undertake a small group project as part of one of their first year modules. They choose and research a topic and deliver a group presentation and poster at the end of Semester 1. The project should develop skills in teamwork, research and communication skills, and should not require students to gain new subject-specific skills.

In this CPLA-supported project a group of final year students - the Peer Assisted Learning leaders - will act as facilitators for this activity, working either singly or in pairs.

Benefits for PAL Leaders include:

- developing personal skills such as leadership, teamwork, interpersonal communication, facilitation and coaching skills
- gaining confidence, through developing adaptability, autonomy and self-efficacy
- providing valuable experience to enhance their CV
- gaining experience in managing groups - useful in just about all careers!

Benefits for the first year students include:

- Help advice and support from more experienced students on the course
- Smoother integration into SHU, the course and transition to student life in general

Benefits for staff, and the course, include:

- Helping to foster a learning community
- Practical help managing the first year academic tutor groups, and in marking their work

Who is involved?

There are 20 final year students acting as PAL leaders for 84 first years in 12 groups. 4 of the groups have one PAL leader; the other 8 have 2. Each group also has one member of academic staff who has overall responsibility for supporting both the first and final year members of the group.

Plan for the Semester

PAL Training was provided before the start of term in a full-day workshop, facilitated by Cathy Pink.

Each group has a weekly timetabled session (30mins) in one of the CETL rooms (see the attached schedule). Half way through the semester an interim review of the operation of the PAL project was carried out. The PAL leader(s) for each group were asked to return a brief questionnaire describing the operation of the sessions and identifying issues and problems that needed to be addressed (some examples attached), A meeting of all PAL leaders was held to talk over these issues.

At the end of the semester, the PAL leaders will where possible help in assessing the group reports and presentations.



PAL Leaders' training session, September 2008

Evaluation

At the end of Semester 1, PAL leaders will be asked to reflect on what has gone well, what could be improved and what they feel they have gained personally from their engagement with the project.

First year students will also be asked, as part of their PDP, to reflect on what they feel they gained from the PAL aspect of the work.

I will then write a summative report of the project, with plans for how it will be implemented next year.

Dissemination

In addition to the written report mentioned above, an oral presentation will be given at the summer ACES LTA conference.

There is also the opportunity to submit a paper for presentation at the HEA conference in Manchester.

Further dissemination opportunities are likely to be offered by the CPLA CETL.

External Interest

Our plans for the PAL project were discussed informally at the Maths, Stats and Operational Research (MSOR) subject centre national conference in Lancaster (September 2008).

This has led to a link with Dr Stephen Kane (Associate Head of the School of Physics, Astronomy & Mathematics at the University of Hertfordshire, and Dr Indra Sinka (Associate Dean, Curriculum Development, Centre for Language and Communication at the Open University) who are engaged on a peer mentoring project.

They attended the interim review meeting, held in November, and would like to attend the summary meeting at the end of the Semester)

PAL Leader Quote:

PAL is going well ... I have really developed my team working skills, knowing how to talk to people and explain ideas. I had improved on these skills on my placement but this challenge has given me a brilliant opportunity to put them to the test and prove that I can lead/aid a team.

I think this opportunity has given me the chance to reflect, seeing how far I have come. I am really not the same person who joined the university 3 years ago. I have not only developed math's skills, soft skills but the opportunities to learn about new cultures, cities and other people's lives has let me grow as a person.

I am going to greatly miss being at this university but the things I have learnt I will keep and take on for life.