

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Maren E. Oates for the degree of Master of Science in College Student Services Administration presented on April 26, 2004.

Title: Students Teaching Students: Understanding the Experiences of Peer Educators in a First-Year Student Seminar

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Peer educator positions on college campuses generally serve to promote student adjustment, retention, and satisfaction. Research indicating the effectiveness of peer educators in a helping role is key to the growth in peer education programs over the past forty years. First-year student seminars are one course where the use of undergraduates as peer educators is increasing on college campuses. The goal of this thesis is to share the results from a qualitative study intended to look at the experiences of undergraduate peer educators teaching a first-year student seminar course. This study hopes to provide a starting point for future research in the areas of peer education programs by beginning to understand: (1) how peer educators define their role in the classroom, (2) the dynamics and challenges of the relationship between peer educator and students with regard to such roles and responsibilities, and (3) what peer educators are able to gain from this experience in terms of knowledge and skills. For faculty and staff working with or supervising peer educators, understanding how students perceive their role and challenges they may experience as a result of conflicting roles could do much to improve selection, training, and support for peer education programs.

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Students Teaching Students: Understanding the Experiences of Peer Educators in a  
First-Year Student Seminar.

by Maren E. Oates

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Maren E. Oates, Author

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# STUDENTS TEACHING STUDENTS: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF PEER EDUCATORS IN A FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SEMINAR

## Introduction

Peer educator, peer helper, peer leader, student paraprofessional, student helper, and student assistant are all terms used to describe similar undergraduate positions designed to provide experienced students the opportunity to help inexperienced or new students on college campuses. As noted by Ender and Kay (2002) “the term used to describe this helping role is not as important as a description of what students do (or do not do) in the role” (p. 1). While dependent on the design of an institution’s peer leadership program(s), peer educators’ responsibilities generally serve to promote student adjustment, retention, and satisfaction. Research indicating the effectiveness of peer educators in a helping role is key to the growth in peer leadership programs over the past forty years.

As I began researching literature on programs for first-year students I found much in the way of rationale for peer education programs as they contribute to new students’ academic and social integration into the college environment. Yet, far less appears to be published focusing on the effect this role has on the peer educator and his or her own development during college. In addition, my personal interest in peer education programs came from my own experiences working with first-year experience programs in the Office of Student Orientation and Retention at Oregon State University (OSU). When glancing at the peer instructor self-evaluations from 2002 for our first-year experience programs I noticed words such as “friend,” “authoritative,” “resource,” “role model,” “supportive,” “coordinator,” “punishing,” and “helping” when describing what students



most and least enjoyed about their experience. To some extent I felt I could relate these terms to my own experiences as a graduate teaching assistant. As a graduate student I would no longer consider undergraduate students my peers. Yet, at times understanding how to establish a separation between myself as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) and undergraduates students in my class or in the student group I am advising is not always clear. My own lack of clarity at times made me wonder if the undergraduates we select as peer instructors ever experience feelings of conflict being a student peer, yet also a teacher.

Questions surrounding the role of peer educators and their experiences were the motivation for my research. Specifically, I hoped to understand:

- How do students view their role as a peer educator?
- How does this role(s) affect peer educators? And, how are peer educators affected by this experience?
- What do they gain from performing this role(s)?
- Is there role conflict that may arise in or out of the program environment?

For faculty and staff working with or supervising peer educators, understanding how students perceive this role and challenges they may experience as a result of conflicting roles could do much to improve selection, training, and support for peer education programs.

## Review of the Literature

### *Review of related theory*

Research by Arthur Chickering (1969, 1993), Nancy Schlossberg (1984, 1995), and Alexander Astin (1977, 1993) has been selected to support the rationale and provide a theoretical grounding for this study. The following sections provide an overview of Chickering's theory of identity development, Schlossberg's transition theory, and Astin's theory of student involvement.

#### *Chickering's Theory of Identity Development*

Building on the identity theory of Erik Erikson (1959), Arthur Chickering (1969) developed his theory of psychosocial development around the central idea that establishing identity is the core developmental issue that students struggle to achieve during their college years (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Chickering's theory was based on his work at Goddard College from 1959 to 1965. At Goddard his task was to, "study the ways in which Goddard students were influenced in their development by the various aspects of this comprehensive experiment," (Thomas & Chickering, 1984, p. 392) which included innovative additions to the college's curriculum such as independent study, off-campus internships, living and learning centers, and individualized degree programs.

In his theory, Chickering (1969) suggests seven vectors that each contribute to an individual's overall identity development. While some theorists use the term stage to denote movement, Chickering chose the term vector intentionally to avoid portraying movement as such a sequential process (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Instead, movement

among the vectors can “occur at different rates and can interact with movement along the others” (p. 34). Yet, while the vectors appear to be a spiral rather than a straight line, they do build on each other, as the concepts of emotional, interpersonal, ethical and intellectual development integrate into a holistic picture of identity (Evans et al., 1998).

The following summaries of each vector are based on the revised version of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory.

The first vector, developing competence, involves the three areas of intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. Intellectual competence involves acquiring skills to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize a particular subject matter (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering’s idea of physical and manual skill development involves “athletic and artistic achievement, designing and making tangible products, and gaining strength, fitness, and self-discipline” (p. 46). Finally, interpersonal competence includes skills for working successfully in groups and effective communication.

Managing emotions may be particularly difficult for students as they transition to college; therefore, the goal of this vector is for students to learn appropriate avenues for expressing their emotions. Students first learn to recognize their feelings as valid, and then express them appropriately instead of repressing emotions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

As students become more independent, seeking less approval from others, Chickering (1993) believes they are moving through autonomy toward interdependence. For individuals to achieve this level of self-sufficiency it will require “both emotional and

instrumental independence, and later recognition and acceptance of interdependence” (p. 47).

At college, students have the opportunity to meet peers that share common interests as well as those very different from themselves. Developing mature interpersonal relationships with their peers involves the tolerance and appreciation of differences in both an intercultural and interpersonal context, as well as developing the capacity for intimacy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Individuals learn to appreciate differences, develop interpersonal skills, resolve conflicts respectfully, and create positive, lasting relationships while moving through this vector.

Some might say that establishing identity is a term that encompasses all seven vectors, and as the fifth vector Chickering and Reisser (1993) intended it to build on the previous four. However, the central theme of this vector is that of building self-confidence and comfort with an individual’s complete self. Within this vector, developing an individual’s identity involves comfort with their physical appearance, sexuality, cultural heritage, and an overall awareness of values, roles, and life style.

For most students the purpose of college includes preparing them for the working world and acquiring the skills needed to get a good job. As students assess their interests, abilities, and goals, they are moving through Chickering’s sixth vector, developing purpose. This vector requires clarifying educational and career goals, as well as interpersonal and family commitments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Finally, the seventh vector, developing integrity, assumes individuals will establish their own belief system. According to Chickering & Reisser (1993), “our core

values and beliefs provide the foundation for interpreting experience, guiding behavior, and maintaining self-respect” (p. 51). To develop integrity individuals must humanize and personalize values, and develop congruence between personal values and socially accepted behavior.

In addition to the seven vectors Chickering (1969) also proposed seven key environmental factors that have a powerful influence on identity development. These factors include (a) clear institutional objectives, (b) institutional size, (c) student-faculty relationships, (d) curriculum, (e) teaching, (f) friendships and student communities, and (g) student development programs and services (Evans et al., 1998).

When first published in 1969, Chickering felt the target audience for *Education and Identity* was faculty, not becoming aware of student affairs professionals as an audience until he was later asked to address the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors conference (Thomas & Chickering, 1984). In an interview 25 years after the original publication of *Education and Identity* Chickering shared that, “student affairs professionals as an audience were not in my mind at all,” yet “it is these student affairs professionals who have made major contributions to the ideas as well as to the application in daily practice” (p. 393).

Student affairs professionals did embrace Chickering’s (1969) theory, but many also criticized the difficulty of applying the vectors to daily practice, especially to women and students from underrepresented populations. Chickering responded to criticism over the applicability of the theory by noting that, “in translating any general theory into concrete applications, the specifics of particular contexts, particular combinations of

institutional mission, and student characteristics need to be taken into account” (Thomas & Chickering, 1984, p. 394). At the time of its original publication the theory was most applicable to a very homogenous population consisting of white, upper- and middle-class male students in the 18 to 25 year old age range. During revisions with Reisser (1993), Chickering addressed concerns about the theory’s applicability to women and certain underrepresented populations, most notably African-American and Hispanic students, through the reordering and renaming of certain vectors.

### *Schlossberg’s Transition Theory*

Nancy Schlossberg’s first publication of her model of adult transition appeared in *The Counseling Psychologist* in 1981. In this article Schlossberg focused primarily on how individuals adapt to transition and how “the individual’s perception of the transition, characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environment, and characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 110) affects one’s ability to adapt. In 1984, Schlossberg published the book, *Counseling Adults in Transition*, which built on the theoretical ideas presented in the previous article, but also provided ideas for application of the theory in counseling programs. With Waters and Goodman, Schlossberg published a revised version of transition theory in a second edition of *Counseling Adults in Transition* in 1995.

This edition was primarily geared toward counseling professionals, and this included an integrated model of application for the theory with Cormier and Hackney’s (1993) counseling model. This model includes five stages that build on each other to assist counselors working with adults that are going through a transition. In relationship

building, which is the first stage, the counselor establishes rapport with the client (Cormier & Hackney, 1993). The second stage involves assessing the individual's environment, internal and external resources, and coping skills. Then during the third stage individuals set goals involving "making a commitment to a set of conditions, a course of action, or an outcome," which would be related to the previous assessment (Cormier & Hackney, p. 27). When the fourth stage of intervention occurs the idea is to "initiate and facilitate desirable change" (Cormier & Hackney, p. 29). During termination and follow-up, the fifth and final stage of the model, those supporting the individual can help review what happened and plan for the future.

At the heart of Schlossberg's theory is the belief that individual behavior is determined by transitions, not by age (Schlossberg & Sarget, 1988) and for a transition to occur it must be perceived as such by the individual. Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined a transition as "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27; as cited in Evans, et al., 1998, p. 111). Adults are continuously experiencing transitions, because "transitions have no end point, rather transitions are a process over time which include phases of assimilation and continuous appraisal" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 65).

To understand how an individual will react to a transition it is important to understand the impact a transition has on an individual's life, the context of their relationship with the transition, and the type of transition. Regarding adult development Schlossberg (1984) saw three types of possible transitions: (a) unanticipated, (b)

anticipated, and (c) nonevents, which are described as events that are expected, but do not occur.

In terms of the transition process Schlossberg et al. (1995) introduced a series of three phases: “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” (Evans et al., 1998). Hopefully the transition itself will provide an opportunity for growth, but decline or ambivalence during this process is also possible. An individual’s ability to turn a transition into a growth opportunity may be influenced by four coping factors: situation, self, support and strategies, also known as the “4 S’s.” An individual’s situation is affected by a combination of the triggering event, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with, concurrent stress, and assessment of the transition. The individual’s self considers personal and demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, and age, as well as psychological resources the individual has acquired such as self-confidence, commitment, and values. The support factor considers the type, functions, and measurement of social support from friends, family, and communities. Finally, strategies that an individual can rely on are defined as “those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing the stress in the aftermath” (Evans et al., p. 114). The variation of these four factors among individuals explains “why different individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times” (Schlossberg et al., p. 49; as cited in Evans et al.).

Typically categorized as a theory of adult development, with regard to theory on the development of college students “Schlossberg’s work can be viewed as psychosocial



and as a counterpoint to age/stage perspectives” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 110). Its applicability to student affairs is far-reaching from counseling programs for students to training programs for student leader positions. In particular, there is much literature on the applicability of transition theory in orientation and first-year experience programs for new students and, more recently, on the idea of senior year experience programs for students approaching graduation.

### *Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement*

There are numerous theories in the field of student affairs that discuss the importance of students’ involvement in the college experience. One of the most noted theories is Alexander Astin’s (1977, 1993) theory of student involvement. Astin’s work is guided by the need to understand how undergraduate students are affected by their college experience. His theory focuses primarily on how student development can be influenced through involvement, as opposed to psychosocial theorists, who study the framework for student development (Astin, 1984). For the basis of his theory and ensuing book *Four Critical Years*, Astin (1977) employed a multi-institutional, longitudinal study of undergraduates during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Astin (1993) built on this earlier body of knowledge with *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited*, feeling such a review was imperative, “considering the numerous ways in which higher education and its student have changed since the early 1970s” (p. 3).

Astin’s (1977, 1993) theory of involvement is supported by five main principles. First, that involvement is the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects, which may be general in terms of the student experience or specific as in a

student preparing for a history mid-term (Astin, 1984). “Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum” (Astin, 1984, p. 298) as different students invest different levels of involvement in the same object. “Involvement also has qualitative and quantitative features” as the amount of time and quality of effort devoted to a given object can be measured. Following this idea is the principle that, “the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (Astin, p. 298). Finally, and of particular interest to student affairs professionals, “the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to that capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (Astin, 1984, p. 298).

Astin (1977, 1993) also discusses a variety of environmental factors, similar to those of Chickering, that have the potential to influence student involvement. These factors include institutional characteristics, curricular measures, student-faculty relationships, and the peer group. In particular Astin (1993) noted, “the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group” (p.4). “The potential impact of the peer environment becomes apparent when one realizes the great variety of roles that the student and his classmates can play with respect to each other: friend, competitor, adviser and confidant, sexual partner, intellectual companion, and so on” (Astin, 1968, p. 15). In *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited*, Astin (1993) found that, “student-student interaction had its strongest positive effects on leadership development, overall academic

development, self-reported growth in problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness” (p. 385).

Such interactions occur in many different forms, settings, and with different purposes, yet research generally suggests that when interactions are educational or intellectually stimulating the effects are almost always beneficial to students (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Bliming, 1996). Astin (1993) suggests ways that student affairs professionals can create opportunities for peer interactions both in and out of the classroom, through programs with residence halls, honors programs, academic departments, athletics, and student government.

#### *Review of Peer Education Programs*

Student affairs professionals have found opportunities to incorporate undergraduate peer leadership in a variety of campus curricular and co-curricular activities. This section provides an overview of peer education programs currently employed at a variety of institutions, with particular emphasis given to peer educator involvement in first-year student seminar courses.

Often the first peer educator new students encounter after choosing an institution is the new student orientation leader. Orientation is considered “any effort on the part of the institution to help entering students make the transition from their previous environment to the college environment and to enhance success at college” (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984, p. 27). Orientation leaders’ interaction with new students may occur during a one or two-day program over the summer or extend into fall term, such as at Indiana University Southeast where Student Ambassadors make six additional contacts

with the students in their orientation groups after the summer program (Clason & Beck, 2002). Regardless of the program design, students in these positions “are critical to the success of any orientation mission; they provide guidance to all orientation participants through role modeling and information sharing” (Pretty, 2000, p. 8).

Another co-curricular program making use of peer educators is in the facilitation of health and counseling workshops. In the 1990s DeLucia (1991) indicated a “growing trend towards training and including peer counselors for more skilled group counseling tasks” (p. 266). Peer educators in a counseling setting have been proven to be effective facilitators of discussions on a variety of social issues including AIDS/HIV education, healthy relationships, eating disorders, and alcohol and drug abuse (DeLucia). At Western Kentucky University, Peers Encouraging Responsible Choices (PERC) work with health education staff members to select which issues to address and what educational activities will help promote a healthy lifestyle and responsible choices on topics such as alcohol and drug use and sexual behavior (Clason & Beck, 2002).

In addition to peer educator involvement in co-curricular activities, over the years undergraduates have been incorporated into academic instruction as teaching assistants in laboratory instruction, supplemental instruction leaders for difficult courses, individual peer tutors, and even lead or co-instructors with faculty or graduate students. Each position involves training undergraduates students to offer academic assistance to other students. Often students are selected for such positions based on their own success in a specific course.

As the leader of supplemental instruction (SI), undergraduates successful in a difficult course provide group tutoring to students in a voluntary, out-of-class setting. Peer tutoring strategies, such as SI, have been found to positively contribute to student involvement in the learning process and enhance students' content mastery (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). Student participation in SI has been shown to significantly reduce course failure, improve course grades, and increase persistence toward graduation (Martin & Arendale, 1990; Martin, Arendale, & Associates, 1993; Martin, Blanc, Debuhr, Garland, & Lewis 1983; as cited in Zaristksy, 2001). The use of such programs also provide many benefits to SI leaders including the reinforcement of knowledge, satisfaction in helping others, increased self-confidence, and the opportunity to get to know faculty (Zaristksy). Additionally, "Astin (1993) found that tutoring other students was positively related to grade-point average, analytical and problem solving skills" (as cited in Terenzini et al., p. 156).

In the classroom, undergraduates who have the opportunity to team-teach with a faculty member as a co-instructor or teaching assistant are able to develop career and life skills in a paraprofessional role, while receiving constructive feedback and guidance from faculty (Rode & Kubic, 2002). The involvement of an undergraduate co-instructor can be a "win-win" for all involved, as the faculty instructor has the student's realistic perspective in the classroom and immediate feedback from an invested student. Gray and Halbert (1998) note that in addition to creating a more student-centered classroom, the student teacher is cast in the role of expert by allowing them to present part of lectures and facilitate in-class exercises, in turn showing students in the class that the material can

be mastered. Among additional benefits to undergraduate involvement in teaching J. E. Miller, Groccia, and M. S. Miller (2001) note that:

Student-assisted teaching models have the potential to facilitate the creation of a true cooperative community of scholars, where students and faculty share responsibility for teaching and learning processes and outcomes, and traditional hierarchical structures are replaced with a greater sense of mentoring and equality between faculty and peer teacher.

(p. 185)

Supplemental instruction, team teaching, and other formats of student-assisted learning have been applied in a wide array of subject areas, including engineering and accounting courses, academic success workshops, and science laboratory sections. First-year seminars are one course where the use of undergraduates as lead and co-instructors is increasing on college campuses. Many institutions develop first-year seminar programs as an extended orientation course focusing on the students' academic success and social integration (Upcraft, 1989; as cited in Lee, 1994). "Using undergraduate paraprofessionals on college campuses has been recognized as an effective strategy for assisting new students in achieving such academic and personal success" (Rode & Kubic, 2002, p.51), which makes finding role models with whom new students can easily identify essential. If the individual is too far removed from the role model the standards and behaviors exhibited may be seen as unattainable (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984). First-year students are thought to relate particularly well to exceptional upper-class

students and in turn are encouraged to excel both academically and as future campus leaders (University of South Carolina, 2003).

In 2000, the National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programming conducted by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition found that out of the 1031 institutions that responded, 749 offered a special course for first-year students. Results indicated that 18.9% involve current students in the instruction of their first-year seminar course, of which 9.6% were upper-level undergraduates, 4.8% were graduate students, and 4.5% other (National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programming).

Undergraduate Peer Instructors (PIs) at Indiana University participate in an intensive leadership seminar to prepare them for the dual role of peer and instructor while teaching the University's Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGs) (Thompson, Westfall, & Reimers, 2001). Allowing teams of undergraduates to take on all instructor responsibilities is one of the key components underlying the program's effectiveness and gives PIs a sense of ownership. After the teaching experience PIs wrote that they became, "critical consumers of their own education, more aware of how teaching and learning styles affect one another, and more discerning and evaluative of the instructional processes in which their professors engaged or failed to engage students in classrooms" (p. 58). Other important outcomes of the program included improved leadership, communication, study skills, and ninety percent of PIs indicated, "increased confidence as teachers and public speakers" (p. 59).

At Washington State University (WSU), where the undergraduate Peer Facilitators are also the lead instructors of the institution's first-year seminar, one Peer Facilitator noted:

I think that the students are going to be a lot more honest and real with people their own age. No matter how comfortable a professor is, it's still intimidating. In the (first-year) seminars, they're learning the same things that they would learn in a "regular" class. I just don't have a Ph.D. We're learning together. (Henscheid, 2001, p. 24)

In making recommendations for replication of a first-year seminar like WSU's, Henscheid cautions that universities need to be willing and prepared to do what few have done, because "peer instructors with primary responsibility for facilitating assignments, grading, and managing a for-credit class of up to 20 students are more rare nationally than co-facilitators and peer tutors who either follow a strict script or work in close collaboration with faculty members" (p. 25). Henscheid also notes that the "paradox inherent in the phrase 'peer facilitator' results in occasional confusion for students and some amount of stress for the facilitator" (p. 25) due to some degree of disagreement in roles, responsibilities, and outcomes.

Perhaps it is this paradox that sets undergraduate instructors apart from other student leader positions such as a student club member or intramural team captain. Student and instructor each have distinct roles with culturally ascribed patterns of behavior and duties (Biddle & Thomas, 1966; as cited in Duba-Biedermann, 1991). A student taking on the additional role of a teacher could experience conflict as the



simultaneous occurrence of two or more expectations would make compliance with one over the other more difficult (Katz & Kahn, 1978; as cited in Duba-Biedermann).

Unfortunately, there is minimal literature available about undergraduate instructors' role conflict experiences, but an undergraduate position that experiences similar role conflict is the resident assistant position. According to Mable & Decoster (1980) "students, as staff members and leaders, are involved in a variety of roles, which are vital to the educational process in college residence halls" (p. 206). As resident assistants, undergraduate students have a variety of responsibilities and roles including providing personal help; managing groups; facilitating social, educational, and recreational programs; referring residents to appropriate resources; enforcing institutional policies and regulations; and maintaining a safe environment for their residents (Upcraft, 1982). The fact that this peer educator position is "a living unit within the residence halls as a staff person...says to every student that you possess certain characteristics that the university respects and considers important," which means many new students will look to their resident assistant as a role model (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984, p. 5).

Deluga & Winters (1990) found that resident assistants who experienced role conflict attempting to satisfy competing and incompatible demands associated with roles such as counselor, teacher, student, friend, and disciplinarian, also felt increased stress and decreased satisfaction with their job. When Kuh & Schuh (1983) studied how the perception of resident assistant roles may or may not change over the course of an academic year, they found that residents' perceptions stayed fairly consistent, while the resident assistants' perception of the appropriateness of the role of disciplinarian

increased 16% and the role of friend actually decreased slightly. Further noted was the incongruence and confusion created for resident assistants from performing counseling, advising, and disciplinary functions, the latter being avoided if possible.

Similarly, the notion of college courses taught by graduate students is a common occurrence, yet there is far less reported concerning undergraduate courses taught by fellow undergraduates (Anderson & Berdie, 1977). A graduate teaching assistant (GTA) may experience conflict and ambiguity while learning to balance the concurrent roles of student and teacher. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) note the irony is that, "the teaching assistant's situation is that of occupying the teaching role because of having been a successful student" however, the essence of teaching is to facilitate rather than display learning (p. 16; as cited in Staton & Darling, 1989). In this sense as GTAs enter their graduate field of study they are expected to learn the expectations, requirements, and ways to perform both student and teacher roles (Duba-Biedermann, 1991). Even the role of student is changing, as GTAs assume the role of advanced learner and at the same time begin to feel and act the way they think a teacher would (Staton & Darling). In addition to conflicting roles, GTAs may experience frustration and anxiety when there is ambiguity about the tasks they are supposed to perform (Duba-Biedermann). Staton & Darling encourage institutions to design training programs for GTAs that develop social support systems, provide information, educate about policies and procedures, and generate new ideas for them to incorporate in their teaching.

The concept of undergraduates as peer educators continues to grow on college campuses, J. E. Miller, Groccia, and M. S. Miller (2001) stress the importance of careful

selection and training of undergraduates, as well as clarification and appropriateness of undergraduate roles. Often the challenge in teaching programs trying to incorporate student-assisted learning is finding a balance between tasks that are menial, meaningful, and overwhelming, as well as “to define an institutionally appropriate dividing line between student and faculty responsibilities” (p. 185). Perhaps better understanding the undergraduate instructors’ experiences, particularly related to role perception, expectations, and conflict, will help identify areas of support necessary to make peer education programs more successful.

## Research Methods

### *Methodology*

“Qualitative researchers’ goal is to better understand the human behavior and experience” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 49). My decision to undertake a study using qualitative research stems from this goal, as I hope to understand the experience of undergraduate students, as they take on a peer educator role in a first-year student seminar. I did not want to create my own definitions of possible roles and experiences forcing participants to select from a pre-determined list. Rather I wanted to allow those participating to speak for themselves, providing their perspectives in their own words using their own “voice”. (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & McCormack Steinmetz, 1991).

In designing my research I felt interviews would be the best means of capturing this perspective. Using interviews allows the exploration of a research topic that would be

otherwise impossible through quantitative methods. The richness and depth of data possible from participant interviews would be difficult to achieve through traditional surveys or document analysis (Ortiz, 2003). According to Bogdan and Biklin (1992), “An interview is purposeful conversation between two people, but sometimes involving more, that is directed by one in order to get information from the other” (p. 96). In qualitative research using interviewing provides for a deeper understanding of people’s meanings and how they organize their behavior (Ely et al., 1991). To arrive at a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences, my individual interviews were semi-structured with a series of open-ended questions addressing my research questions.

In addition to individual interviews I engaged in group interviews, which from this point forward will be referred to as focus groups. While a type of group interview, focus groups rely “on interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who typically takes the role of a moderator,” instead of a series of alternating questions and responses between researcher and participant (Morgan, 1997, p. 2). “Focus group interviews are designed to elicit performance, information, attitudes and ideas from a group in which each participant possesses experience with the phenomenon under study” (Kelly, 2003, p. 50). Rossman and Rallis (1998) describe the strength of focus group interviews:

The interaction among participants is the critical characteristic of this type of interviewing. This technique assumes that an individual’s attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum: People often need to listen to others’

opinions and understandings to clarify their own. (p. 135; as cited in Kelly, p. 55)

The ability to link individual interviews with focus groups is particularly useful as a means of generating discussion guides to move from broad to more specific experiences, feelings, and opinions.

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were Oregon State University (OSU) Odyssey Peer Leaders for fall term 2003. Peer Leaders are undergraduate peer educators who individually or co-teach a section of OSU Odyssey. Odyssey (ALS 111) is a voluntary pass/no pass, 1-credit, first-year student seminar designed as the third component of OSU's orientation process. The other components include START, the summer advising and registration program, and CONNECT, which is a week of social and educational activities prior to the first week of fall classes. Odyssey as an extended orientation was created in 1997 to further ensure a successful transition for new students into the OSU community. Odyssey participants explore academic success, positive relationships with faculty, staff and students, career and academic opportunities, campus resources, and time management strategies (Student Orientation and Retention, 2003). In addition, about twelve to fifteen course sections of Odyssey, known as FOOTsteps, include a one to three day outdoor adventure trip, which occurs during the previously mentioned CONNECT week.

Newly selected Peer Leaders take a 3-credit training course (ALS 407) during spring term prior to teaching that focuses on teaching strategies, developing a syllabus,

class activities and topics, and learning about OSU resources and services. Peer Leaders that have successfully taught an Odyssey course before must reapply, but do not repeat the training course. All Peer Leaders are registered for two or three internship credits (ALS 410) during the term they teach Odyssey. The Director of Student Orientation and Retention (SOAR), who is responsible for the office's First-Year Experience programming, supervises Peer Leaders.

Due to my own involvement with the SOAR office as an employee, it is important to note that participation in this study was completely voluntary and Peer Leaders had the option to decline the invitation to participate. While I knew some participants prior to their involvement in this study, I am not responsible for supervising Peer Leaders. In addition, participants were aware that their decision to or not to participate would not affect their final evaluation or grade for ALS 410 credits.

On September 22, 2003 I attended a pre-teaching meeting for all fall term Peer Leaders. My purpose for attending this meeting was two-fold. First, I intended to recruit potential participants for this study. At the end of the meeting I read a brief statement explaining the purpose of my research, time commitment, potential risks and benefits, and offered the opportunity to ask any questions. I then circulated a sign-up sheet consisting of spaces for name, phone, and email. At this meeting six individuals indicated interest in participating.

During the Peer Leader meeting I also distributed a brief survey with 4 open-ended questions designed to learn about the Peer Leader's expectations and perceptions prior to their teaching experience (Appendix D). Forty-four out of the sixty-six in

attendance at this meeting completed and returned the survey. This survey was not intended to be used as an additional method for data collection, but rather to assist in developing questions and thoughts to guide future interviews.

To increase participation, I requested a list of all OSU Peer Leaders for fall term 2003 from the SOAR office after this meeting. Using this list I contacted all Peer Leaders that had not already indicated interest in participating via email as an additional form of recruitment. One week later I also contacted individuals that had indicated interest at the previous meeting to confirm their interest in participating.

Out of the seventy-three undergraduate Peer Leaders teaching during fall term there were twelve participants in this study. I had hoped to recruit approximately fifteen participants, as an appropriate number to achieve saturation of information from interviews. According to Siedman (1998) "saturation is met when the same information is heard repeatedly throughout the interviews" (p. 48, as cited in Oritz, 2003). While not fifteen, I am confident that participants involved reflect a range of experiences associated with this site and a repetition of opinions and ideas based on this experience.

From these efforts I provided all twelve Peer Leaders that indicated interest with a copy of the one "Informed Consent" document, used for both individual interviews and focus groups, to review prior to their involvement (Appendix C). This document provides an explanation of the purpose, time commitment, and potential risks and benefits of participating in the research, as well as complete contact information for me, as the researcher, and the University's Institutional Review Board. In addition to the primary criteria of individually or co-teaching Odyssey during fall term, it was important for the

purposes of participant selection that all individuals have a clear understanding of the research objectives, the ability to openly articulate their feelings in individual and group settings, as well as an interest in exploring their own teaching experience.

Selected participants ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-two and in class year from sophomore to fifth-year senior. There are generally twice as many female Peer Leaders than male, fifty female and twenty-three male during Fall 2003. However, in this study females are over-represented with ten female participants and only two male participants. Seven participants were teaching Odyssey for their first time, four for their second time, and one participant was teaching Odyssey for her third time. It should be noted that participants teaching Odyssey for their second or third time during the research process were more experienced and may not be encountering the same challenges in their second or third year.

Fifty-three of seventy-three Peer Leaders during Fall 2003 taught Odyssey with a partner, usually another undergraduate student, but in this study half of the participants teaching were individually and the other half were co-teaching the course. It should also be noted that two of the participants teaching individually during 2003 had taught previously with a faculty or staff member. Also, while not a definable characteristic I would consider all participants to be involved and active undergraduate students, participating in a variety of activities including Greek house leadership, student clubs and organizations, on-campus & off-campus employment, intramural sports, and student media positions.



### *Data Collection*

During the fourth and fifth weeks of fall term, one individual interview, up to 60 minutes in length, was conducted with each of the twelve participants. All interviews were tape-recorded and held in the Education Hall on the OSU campus. Although interviews are often considered relatively open-ended and emergent allowing subjects to change the focus or content of the interview, the structure is usually focused on a particular topic (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992). I wanted to understand the general feelings and situations associated with my participants teaching experience, yet I guided my questions to focus on the main ideas central to my research. Sample questions used to frame the interviews were as follows:

- Please describe your Odyssey teaching experience.
- What has been the most challenging and rewarding part of the experience?
- Describe your role(s) as an Odyssey instructor.
- What role(s) do you feel most and least comfortable with as an Odyssey instructor?
- How do you communicate your role(s) (or expectations) to students in your class?

During the last week of Odyssey, the eighth week of the term, all participants were invited to participate in one of three focus groups. Only those who participated in an individual interview were asked to participate in focus groups. At this point, most participants were done or almost done teaching Odyssey and the experience was believed to be very fresh in their minds. Ten of the original twelve participants were able to

participate in the focus groups. Two of the focus groups had two participants, while the third had six. Due to the small size of two groups some might question whether these do in fact constitute a focus group. Morgan (1997) has indicated that the general rule of thumb for most focus groups is 6 to 10 participants. However, “small groups work best when the participants are likely to be both interested in the topic and respectful of each other” (Morgan, p. 42), of which both are true for participants in this study.

Focus groups were designed as an opportunity to test themes, experiences, or terms commonly referred to during the individual interviews. As students interact with each other during focus groups they bounce ideas off one another and form opinions based on the conversations with others (Kelly, 2003). During these conversations participants, “have the opportunity to clarify or modify their ideas through discussion and challenge with other participants” (p. 50).

At the beginning of each focus group each participant introduced himself or herself, indicated his or her year in school, and how many Odyssey classes he or she had completed to this point. Each focus group lasted up to one and a half hours in length. All focus groups were located in the Education Building and tape-recorded to accurately and thoroughly record participant’s comments. Participants understood that they could leave at any time without penalty. Pizza and soda pop were provided as an incentive for participation and to assist in creating a casual environment.

### *Data Analysis*

After all individual interviews and focus groups I created verbatim transcripts of these conversations. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality

and anonymity. All forms of data, including transcripts and my own notes and observations from all interviews, were kept confidential and viewed only by the researcher, during this research process.

To begin interpreting my data I relied on the ideas of Bogdan and Biklin (1992) who suggest researchers should, “search your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns” (p. 166). This means of sorting data into categories is referred to as “coding.” I reviewed transcripts multiple times coding and re-coding data until I felt comfortable with the categories as a means of developing broader themes to organize my final analysis. As Ely (1984) states, “a theme can be defined as a statement of meaning that (1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact” (as cited in Ely et al., 1991, pg. 150). As themes emerged I collected quotes from individual interviews and focus groups representing these thematic areas, eventually selecting those most expressive for my themes.

### Background on the Participants

The following descriptions provide a brief background for each of the twelve participants in this study. Each has been assigned a pseudonym name to ensure his or her anonymity and confidentiality.

Doug is a junior at Oregon State, majoring in Psychology. This is his second year teaching Odyssey, but his first time teaching a FOOTsteps section of the course. This

year his class meets twice a week for fifty minutes. He has taught both classes with Stacy, another participant in this study. His motivation to teach Odyssey came from his own negative experience with the course during his freshmen year, which he was able to learn from to provide more help to new students in his classes. He took the training course, ALS 407, at the end of his freshmen year, prior to his first time teaching.

Kelly is a first-year senior at Oregon State, majoring in Exercise and Sports Science. She is teaching Odyssey for the third time and this year she is teaching individually. During her two prior classes she taught with a faculty member, but they shared all the responsibilities. In the past she has also had a FOOTsteps section, but this year she has a regular Odyssey course that meets twice a week for fifty minutes. She also took the training class at the end of her freshmen year prior to her first time teaching the course.

Krista is a second-year senior at Oregon State, majoring in Exercise and Sports Science. This is her first year teaching Odyssey and she teaches individually. Her class meets once a week for an hour and a half. Krista was not able to take the training class during the spring, because it conflicted with another course in her major, but she felt comfortable teaching on her own, because of her other involvement and previous positions on campus.

Kyle is a senior at Oregon State, majoring in Political Science and Speech Communication. This is her second year teaching Odyssey. During her first year she taught with a staff member, but this year is teaching individually. Her class meets twice a week for fifty minutes. She never took Odyssey as a freshman and never took the training

class, but feels that her involvement in other campus activities has been beneficial. This year she feels comfortable teaching on her own, because the staff member she taught with last year gave her a lot of opportunities to lead the class and “run the show.”

Jasmine is a sophomore at Oregon State and is a Pre-Pharmacy major. She is co-teaching with another Peer Leader this year and their class meets once a week for an hour and a half. She actually started college at 17, so she is currently 18 and the same age as many of the students in her class. She took the training class during the spring and then also decided to take a business-writing course during the summer, which required her to give speeches. She tends to get nervous public speaking, so that has helped her with the “teaching stuff.”

Jesse, a sophomore at Oregon State, is majoring in Exercise and Sports Science. Her class meets once a week for an hour and a half. She is teaching on her own for the first time. Jesse was supposed to have a co-teacher, but they had conflicting fall schedules, so it didn’t work out for them to team-teach. She took the training class last spring and also took Odyssey last year as a freshman. She realized that, “Odyssey wasn’t the class I was dying to go to every week, but I really felt like I got something out of it.” That is the main reason why she wanted to teach this year.

Jessica, a senior at Oregon State, is majoring in Exercise and Sports Science. She is teaching individually for her first time. Her class meets once a week for an hour and a half. Jessica took the training course last spring and definitely felt it was beneficial to develop a network with the other teachers, so that she could hear about other classes.

Lisa, a senior at Oregon State, is majoring in Communications. She is teaching own her own for the first time. Her class meets once a week for an hour and a half. She took the training course during the spring and also took Odyssey during her freshmen year, which was “a fun class”. She says that she has remained friends with people that she met in Odyssey. Lisa’s sister, a freshman, randomly selected her Odyssey class when she was registering, but Lisa actually finds it comforting to have her in the class.

Megan is a junior at Oregon State and is a General Science major with a Pre-Physical Therapy option. She is teaching Odyssey for the first time with another Peer Leader. Their class meets once a week for an hour and a half. Megan took Odyssey as a freshman and also took the training course last spring. She has been enjoying working with her co-teacher and says that, “he and I have a great time.”

Robert is a junior at Oregon State and is majoring in Electrical Engineering. He is teaching for the first time with a graduate student. Their class meets once a week for an hour and a half. It is a FOOTsteps section, but Robert wasn’t able to go on the trip before the class began. He took the training course last spring and also feels his other leadership positions have helped him feel prepared for this experience.

Stacy, a first-year senior, is in her third year at Oregon State and is majoring in Business Administration with a marketing option. This is her second year teaching Odyssey with Doug, who is also a participant in this study. As mentioned before their class is a FOOTsteps section that meets twice a week for fifty minutes. Stacy transferred to OSU her sophomore year, so she never took Odyssey, but remembers a similar class at her first institution. She also never took the training class, because she was asked to co-

teach by Doug at the last minute when his original partner didn't return to OSU in the fall.

Willow, a junior at Oregon State, is a Speech Communication major and also in the ROTC program. She is teaching with another Peer Leader, who is also her roommate. Their class meets once a week for an hour and a half. This is her second year teaching. She taught with a Peer Leader her first year. They didn't work very well together, but she feels the mistakes they made really help when preparing for classes this year. She took both Odyssey and the training class her freshmen year, before her first time teaching.

### Data Results

The following themes are the result of shared experiences, opinions, and feelings from participants' individual interviews and focus groups. Represented in these themes is an attempt to understand participant roles as an Odyssey Peer Leader; conflicts or challenges that arise from these roles; and areas of knowledge and skill development attained during their experience.

#### *Theme 1: Participants Define a Peer Leader Using Terms that Encourage Student Success*

The term "role" can be defined as "the actions and activities assigned to or required or expected of a person or group" (Princeton University Wordnet, 1997). The rationale and theory behind involving students as peer educators, mentors, instructors, etc. has been identified through a review of peer education literature. However, what about the concept of a peer instructor's role in the classroom? What is expected or

required of a peer instructor? What activities or actions are they assigned in this role?

Included in the training notebook for Oregon State Peer Leaders (Student Orientation and Retention, 2003) is a page titled, "Role and Purpose of the Student Peer Leader." This page provides an outline of possible roles for Peer Leaders including: "(1) Representative or advocate for the student point of view, (2) Expert on specific topics, (3) Mediator between students or students/faculty, and (4) Coach or mentor to students." (Student Orientation and Retention, p. 6). Yet, are the roles outlined through the training class and supplemental materials those that the Peer Leaders choose for themselves?

In addition, there is a detailed explanation of the ways that undergraduate Peer Leaders can serve as a resource for first-year students about student culture, university procedures, student concerns, or issues outside of the classroom. Participants often described themselves as a "resource" including Kelly who said during a focus group:

I would definitely say that I'm a resource. I had different people coming up to me asking me random questions about campus. Like, "Where can I find my advisor?" Even if I don't know the answer at least I know where to find the answer, whereas they don't even know stuff like that or what questions to ask.

Stacy provides an almost identical definition in her individual interview when responding to a question asking her to describe her role:

To be like a resource to them. I got an email a couple days ago from one of our students that was like, "How do I declare a major? I'm in UESP and I don't know how." So, just it's really easy instead of having to go find



like an advisor or someone like that, they can just write an email. Something like that I usually know the right answer, but I can also point them in the right direction.

Megan compared her role as a resource to that of being a resident assistant in a residence hall, “It’s kind of nice to have someone, like you’re another RA. I don’t know. I grew up in the residence halls with the RAs and they were the resource and knew where to go.” Consistent with the idea of being a resource were the terms related to helping students or being a “Big Sis or Bro” as described by some participants. Jessica used this term when defining her role as:

More kind of like a ‘Big Sister’ type of thing, but without all the ties and the complications. Just being somebody who they can email with any questions and the level of trust is there...you know, so basically my role is just being somebody that has been here for longer, you know still a student, still in their shoes, but I just know the ropes.

The fact that they are a student resource was also an important component of their role as is evident in this statement by Krista who told her class that, “I want to be kind of like you’re helping hand to Oregon. I’m your student connection to OSU and any of those questions that you have that you don’t want to ask a faculty you can ask me.”

The idea of being a role model led to an interesting discussion among participants. While many used phrases or descriptions that I would associate with the idea of being a role model, when the term came up during one focus group there was clear disagreement among participants as seen in the following conversation:

Kelly: I guess don't really feel in a position to be a role model, besides when I'm in class everyday.

Megan: I kind of feel the same way, I guess I kind of feel like I could be a role model, but they don't see me outside of class, so they don't really see what I do. But, I know I could do that if the situation was different.

Stacy: I agree, I think it kind of depends on the student. Because I definitely think I was a role model at the beginning for a couple students who had a really hard time at the beginning, two girls, which actually surprised me. I really think they looked up to me and that they are more comfortable, but I don't think the class as a whole felt that way.

Jessica: I think for me it was more like I was a role model in certain aspects. Academically I was a role model because I would talk about the classes I was in and the classes they were in, which I had taken most of them, because they are in all the intro stuff. So we talked about that and they would kind of see that, "Oh she's done that and she did well, so I can." And then we'd talk about involvement on campus and I would say what I was involved in...So, I think they did see me as a role model in many aspects even if they didn't see me outside of class. I felt like I was really being myself in class and really representing who I was.

It appears there is disagreement in how participants define the term "role model."

Some of the participants in the above conversation felt it includes the ability for students

to see their actions and activities outside the classroom, which most of their students do not. Kyle also seemed hesitant using the term role model:

I don't know. I mean I'm sure in some way, yeah, but I don't know. I think in a way yes, but in a way no. Most of the time it's just like, I think more of a role model of me trying to get them involved...not necessarily like, "Wow, she gets great grades." "She's a senior." More like, "Oh I can do that too".

While she may not like the term role model, during her individual interview Kyle described a moment in class that turned into an opportunity to teach time management skills allowing her, "to use my experiences to teach them how I've been successful." Like Kyle, other participants used their own personal means of achieving success as a way to provide an example of a successful college student. Many participants echoed the importance of modeling involvement beyond the classroom as a means of being successful in college. Kelly believes the main purpose for the class is "for getting involved. If you miss a class you're not getting involved. I'll give you something, a way for you to actually get to know the campus more." When describing the example he is trying to provide for his students Doug said, "Being there as an example to them...showing them that there are other things at college than academics...I'm personally a big advocate for being involved." Krista uses the similar term of "mentor" in her individual interview saying, "Almost kind of like a mentor, because I really do want them to do well at OSU and their first term is so important."

Throughout participants' comments is the importance of helping first-year students transition to college and succeed in their new environment, often offering positive reinforcement or recognition. "I try to encourage them to be successful, not to be mediocre," said Robert. "I like seeing students get involved. I'll read the barometer and I'll see old student's names. It's good to know that they're still here. Seeing students on campus at the gym saying 'Hi'. It's cool keeping the first years active and involved on campus," said Kelly during an individual interview. Being able to witness success among their students also helps validate their efforts as a resource. Doug noted, "You really feel like you impact them when they'll email you and ask you random questions about a class or a social aspect or anything like that."

However, there is always the possibility that participants may have a student that isn't successful or struggles, which can affect them in the opposite way. "One of my students actually at the end of last fall term went home and he is in drug rehab now. So, I am like, 'Oh, I didn't do my job,' but no. Other than that I've had a good time," shared Kyle when reflecting on the students from her first Odyssey class.

This disappointment related to student failure or struggle, should not however be interpreted as participants' feeling responsible for their students' success. While all felt fostering and encouraging student success is an important role, many made the distinction that they do not feel responsible for student success and that according to Lisa acting as a resource meant, "putting everything out there on a table." "I offer a lot of resources, but they have to be paying attention," added Kyle. Krista also said, "I feel I'm responsible for

showing them all the resources, you know? Where they can get help for whatever they need, but then it's up to them to do it."

The roles and purpose for undergraduate Peer Leaders as defined by the Office of Student Orientation and Retention do seem to align with ideas of being either a resource or a role model as defined by participants. In these roles participants are experts on policies and procedures, representatives for student opinions, and serve as possible mentors, yet another possible role emerged in participant statements. The idea of being a "friend" to students was also discussed, but participants varied in terms of how this role (or relationship) is defined.

"I am an instructor, but I'm almost more comfortable being their friend. That's a role I feel pretty good in," said Krista during her individual interview. Yet, it wasn't clear what exactly the friend role consisted of, because to a greater extent perhaps than being a resource, role model, or mentor the term "friend" implies a close relationship. Some participants did express a friend connection with their students. "I really feel like I'm their friend now, I didn't really feel that way to begin with, but we just had our last class and I am so sad that they're gone now. I couldn't believe how I felt, but I see them around still. I told them to call me if they need anything. I gave them all my information. They are totally my friends," said Megan during a focus group. Stacy followed her comment with, "Our last day was today and they were all giving hugs, everyone was so sad. We've definitely got that friendship bond, its not teacher-student anymore." Doug, Stacy's co-teacher, echoed her sentiments during his individual interview, "You know we check in during class and ask them about their weekend and they all say, 'We did such

and such' or they hung out and stuff like that. And I think this term compared to last year when I did it, I think I'm friends with a lot more of them and hope I stay friends with them after class."

However, not all participants considered their role as friend one that extends beyond the classroom. "I don't know any of them outside of class, so we don't have an outside social thing, so it's not like I have friends in my class that I want to hang out with or anything," shared Jasmine during her individual interview. Kyle expressed a similar feeling:

Just kind of someone, not necessarily a friend, but at the same time you know someone who if they are having troubles in school would come and talk to me and the students kind of as friends. Cause I don't necessarily know if like...a lot of them would consider me a friend, but it's not like I would go and hang out with them outside of class. I just don't feel it is necessarily appropriate.

Kyle presents the idea that this "friendship" doesn't extend beyond the classroom, but she also noted in her individual interview that in the classroom students may come to her saying, " 'Oh I had a horrible day. I had a really bad mid-term.' So being kind of in that friend role too." Similarly, Jessica felt that, "It's nice to be able to say you're doing a good job, I think that is important...Or just letting them know you're doing good, or it will get better, hang in there you know."

Perhaps participants' roles include more than just being someone that provides information, like a resource, or someone to look up to, like a role model, but also

someone that provides emotional or social support as a friend would if they were having difficulties. Whether it is listening as a friend might do when a student is having a bad day or just trying to establish a relationship where students feel comfortable asking anything, it appears that while harder to define the role of “friend”, participants’ comments related to this role again echo the importance of helping new students succeed.

*Theme 2: Balancing roles created challenges for participants*

At times the relationship aspect of participants’ roles described in the first theme, created challenges as participants sought to establish respect, define boundaries, and resolve conflict related to certain teaching responsibilities. These challenges will be presented through the following two sub-themes: (1) Establishing relationships, respect, boundaries and (2) Conflict within specific roles.

*Establishing Relationships, Respect, and Boundaries*

Jesse explained how she approaches the experience of being a Peer Leader:

I kind of went in with the mentality of like, I’m not there to be your teacher I’m there to help you out and teach you something, cause I’ve been here for a year and I know what’s going on, so I’m not trying to put you guys in your place or fail you from your first class in college. I’m just trying to help you out, so that you know what’s coming.

It is evident that many participants, such as Jesse, are very determined to help new students either as a resource, role model, or friend. Yet, while their main goal involves helping students succeed and feel connected during their first term, Peer Leaders are teaching college courses, with the same responsibilities as an instructor. Teaching

responsibilities imply a certain amount of authority for grading, assignments, class facilitation and management. Megan noted that, “there is definitely a balance there trying to be like, ‘I’m here for you. And we’ll do stuff that you want to do, but you have to be respectful and you have to do everything you’re expected to do.’ ”

Establishing respect as an instructor proved to be difficult for some participants such as Krista who said, “most challenging is definitely having them take me seriously. I’ve had two homework assignments due so far and almost half of them have been late and I think that it’s just hard for me to get them to see me as an instructor as well as just a student.” Robert also had situations where trying to be both a student or friend and an instructor proved unsuccessful. “Like, I’m trying to be the teacher, but I’m also trying to be your friend. Cause, I joked around with a few of them, all of them, so that kind of I’ve noticed in certain situations has come back to bite me in the ass cause after a while they’re all like, ‘Oh you’re just a friend.’ ” Additionally, when trying to maintain control of the classroom, the balance between friend and authority is challenging as Stacy realized:

Sometimes we’ve lost control of the class. This year specifically, because they respect us, but then they also see us as just one of their friends, which is good and bad. And there’ve been times when we’ve been trying to have a class discussion and all they want to do is talk about what they did last weekend or stuff like that, which is fine to a point, but you know sometimes you do need to get things done. So it’s hard sometimes to keep the control.



However, some participants believed there were ways to be successful in establishing respect as a teacher while still maintaining their student-to-student relationship. Doug commented in his individual interview on the benefits of establishing a friend relationship as a means of building respect:

This year helped a lot better, because we had the Footsteps trip and everybody got to know each other really, really well on a friendship level, so I think that there was respect established that way. And like we kind of talked about it at the beginning, “You know we want to have fun with you guys, we want to be your friends, but at the same time you have to respect us.” Just the simple act of us saying it I think helped a lot with like everyone showing up to class and like no one goofing off.

As participants are also students, they may also be dealing with the demands of being a student, such as midterms, roommates, and time management. Students in participants’ classes may think that a fellow student may be more lenient, which as Kyle found can be difficult when trying to maintain class expectations. “They kind of start noticing that I’m a student and they’re a student, so they kind of took privilege of that,” she said, recognizing that some students may try to take advantage of a fellow student in a teaching position. In addition Willow noted that sometimes she wishes she could just be a student with her class. “It’s hard to keep up those walls. You want to like joke around and like when they say something stupid you want to laugh...like when they’re having a funny conversation in the middle of a lecture you want to like laugh with them, but you gotta be like, ‘Dude, shut up!’ ” Doug best summarizes many participants’ feelings in the

statement, “There is a fine line between being their friend and being, you know, their instructor.”

The “fine line” or boundaries of participant’s student-teacher relationship can be tested by out of the classroom interaction as explained by Willow:

It’s harder than you’d think, like harder than I would’ve thought. Cause like, I’m 21, I drink, it’s legal, it’s cool. But, I remember not being 21 you know. That didn’t stop me from drinking. So, it’s hard to remember that I’m a teacher, I can’t talk to them about this party I went to this weekend or I can’t like hear about the party they went to this weekend. I can’t encourage under age drinking and all this other stuff, it’s weird. And it’s hard, because they automatically have to not like you, because you’re their teacher. And like, Molly (co-teacher) is actually in Academic Success with one of our students. She told me, “One of our students is in my class.” I was like, “That sucks!” Cause you’re trying to...it’s weird, especially being an undergrad, because I live in the dorms. A lot of my students like either live in Bloss, Halsell, or Finley, so I see them all the time. So it’s really weird, like the boundaries are weird. Do we hang out? Do we say hi? Like, cause I’m still a student. I don’t really have any authority what so ever... It feels weird I’m not a teacher, but I’m not a peer with them either, like I can’t hang out with them or talk to them, be like, “Hey let’s go get a beer.” It’s harder than I thought it would be.

Sometimes the students in the class may create situations or interactions that participants recognize as pushing the boundaries of the relationship. Kyle recalled:

One of them asked me to buy him alcohol and I went, “I don’t think that’s quite appropriate, but nice try.” But I think he was totally joking, wasn’t really asking to see if I would buy him alcohol...And he just started laughing. He’s like, “Yeah we’ll have to have a drink sometime.” I was like “Yeah for sure I really enjoy drinking with minors.” Ah, no I don’t think so.

Stacy expressed annoyance with her students trying to establish a relationship beyond the classroom:

My students are out of control, like they have our phone numbers obviously, because they are on our syllabus and the girls call Doug all the time, they are like out of control, they do not have the boundaries...And he’s not like, “Oh yeah”, he’s like, “Why are they calling me?” He either doesn’t answer or, I mean he never sees them outside of class. But then today, they were like, “Hey now that we’re not your students...” So, my students’ boundaries are not there.

Although interestingly two participants, Kelly and Megan, sometimes felt like they were the ones pushing the boundaries with their students, as opposed to the other way around. Megan shared how excited she gets when she sees her students around campus, “I feel like maybe they would want to set up boundaries with me, because when ever I see them I’ll be like, ‘Hey what’s going on?’ And today I saw one of my kids in

the concert band when they were performing in the MU and I was up above and I was like, 'Bill Hey!' and he heard me and looked up and... (imitation of sheepish wave)."

Also, Kelly felt that being the authority figure, made students feel uncomfortable if boundaries were tested outside the classroom, "No, I would say they put more boundaries up than I do, cause I mean I've gone to a house party before and seen two of my Odyssey students and they'll be like (imitating putting beer behind her back)."

Regardless of which party is testing the boundaries of the student-teacher relationship in peer education it may be hard to understand where that fine line is in terms of being a friend, teacher, student resource or role model. The next section identifies how relationships and roles may come into conflict with participants' responsibilities, authority, and image.

### *Conflict within Specific Roles*

As participants assumed different roles as Peer Leaders some noted the importance of maintaining a certain image that may be associated with each role. As a role model to new students two participants expressed a desire to present a certain image related to drinking and partying while at college. Krista recalled an experience while she was out one evening during a focus group, "Yeah, I was walking from class to Tailgaters and we where going to Circle K to go buy beer, and you know I was not 100% and I saw a girl in my Odyssey class and I thought I can't let her see me like this you know, I'm the one she's supposed to look up to and what does it say if here I am on a Thursday night, you know woo hoo." Reflecting on this comment, Doug added,

I like to think, you know we are “Peer Leaders” and so whether you have a positive influence or a negative influence, you’re automatically going to have an influence, just because nine times out of ten they’re not going to know people that are older than them and have had these experiences, so they will look to you as kind of like what a model of what an OSU student could be. And, so I think that you’re in a really important position, cause you do have to watch yourself, because what if you’re the teacher and you end up in the Police Beat, that’s not good. So, you definitely have a bigger responsibility that extends beyond the classroom.

While the image participants associate with being a role model will vary, there is a sense from the earlier description that being a role model is related to their actions in and out of the classroom. If participants see themselves as role models, as did Robert, there may be disappointment with letting down the students in their class. “As far as I can see I am a role model, but like I don’t know I’d feel bad if they saw me, I don’t know doing something they didn’t agree with and then they saw me and they thought maybe I’m not such a good role model or something like that. That’s about the only thing that I would kind of like feel like I let them down or let somebody down,” shared Robert during a focus group.

Another potential area of conflict for participants was related to their image as an authority figure or OSU expert in the course. Two participants that were close in age to some students in their courses expressed feelings about their confidence giving advice to students that were of the same or close age. Jasmine, a sophomore, felt at times, “It’s kind

of weird, especially, because like when I started I was 17, I'm only 18 now, I'll be 19 in December, but a lot of people in the class are already 19 or you know 20, so it's kind of weird, because they are actually older than I am to be getting like advice." Also while Jesse feels comfortable with her class now, at the beginning she recalls:

That was one of the other things I had a really big issue with before I went in. Like before I stepped into the classroom the first time, I'm only a year older than these guys, maybe not even for some of them, so that's kind of hard...it's just like you know I'm not really your peer, but I am you know?

Robert noted similar feelings of conflict when he realized he had taken a course with one of the students in his class. "He was also in one of my classes this summer, so he'd already taken classes at OSU. Yeah so, that makes is a little bit weirder too, because I'm like I'm trying to teach this guy or whatever, I'm the instructor and he's like smarter than me."

Building on the idea of conflict as an authority figure or expert is perhaps the type of conflict mentioned most frequently by participants, which is conflict associated with typical teaching responsibilities, such as grading and assigning homework. As an instructor of the course participants had the responsibility for grading, which in this case was Pass or No Pass, as well as developing assignments and a syllabus. The ability to have ownership of their class was exciting for participants, as Jessica explained in her individual interview, "I thought it was great, because I could really plan it with what I thought I needed freshmen year or what my friends thought that they needed." Yet, with

ownership comes authority and many participants provided experiences, feelings, or reflections on how issuing grades created frustration or conflict. In her second year of teaching, Kyle shared during a focus group that she has been able to learn from past experiences, but still recognizes that:

Trying to be the grader is sometimes hard when you're just trying to help them you know...I'm a student, they see that, I'm trying to help them out, trying to be cool with them and then I know they're not going to do all their assignments. That's the only time it comes into conflict, but I think building a relationship as friends helps sometimes, because they realize, "Kyle has worked so hard for me, I want to work hard for her," so sometimes that helps, but sometimes that also comes in conflict.

Some participants shared situations where students were in danger of not passing and how they felt about that experience. Robert said, "That's about the only thing I had problems with or was worried about, because they were all quite respectful to me and my co-instructor and you know guest speakers, so there wasn't really disciplinary action. But, there were two people that you know I was thinking we might have to not pass, so we were freaking out." Even Jessica, who tried to be very clear with her expectations the first day of class, found herself in a conflicting situation when two students were not fulfilling her requirements.

I had two students not show and not give me prior notice, which is what the syllabus stated. If they told me then at least we could make other arrangements, but they didn't tell me, so I got home and I was kind of

pissed, because it was a fun day going to the athletic press boxes and on the field, so in my mind it was a great class. But there was nothing from them and they were kids that had not missed a class, which was really weird, because they were good kids. So I sent an email to them saying, "Sorry we missed you in class today, don't forget to turn in your assignment, send it to me by this date." But then they had two assignments due that day and you could only miss one or you won't pass the class. So, they'd already basically failed in my mind, but I was like, "No they'll get me the assignments." Well I don't get anything. So I was like freaking out. And so I went to talk to Kris [Peer Leader supervisor], because I was out of control trying to find loopholes in my syllabus and she kept on giving me all these really good ideas, but I just kept coming back to no, but they didn't do the work I'll have to fail them.

Participants also expressed thoughts about how conflicts over grading might seem more challenging depending on the type of relationship they have with a student. Megan is one participant that felt strongly that she was "friends" with her students. However, one situation she recalls during a focus group may have been increasingly difficult, because of her relationship with this particular student:

I didn't know what do to, it wasn't like a bad thing, but I really liked him.

And I just joined the Ultimate Frisbee team and he's on the guys team and I'm on the girls team, so I'd see him all the time, because we had practice together. And he wasn't getting his stuff in and he wasn't coming to class,



just because. So, I was freaking out and I tried to get a hold of him by email and he didn't respond to me, so I didn't know if he got it or not. And I was like, "I'm willing to meet you half way on this, if you do this, this, and this, and get it to me by next class you're fine, but you have to do this and get it in to me on time." And I was so worried, because he didn't email me back, but he did it (sigh of relief). He did, Oh I was so glad, he brought this whole stack of things into me, all this stuff, extra credit stuff, but I didn't know what to do...I didn't want anyone to fail...But I was talking to my mom about it, she's a fifth grade teacher and my dad is a college counselor, and I was telling them, how I wanted to like call his room and say, "Listen you're not going to pass!" And they were like, I think all first year teachers feel like that and I was so glad you know, because I was just so worried.

Two participants offered their own reflections about this type of situation. Willow thought that:

It might actually be easier to be the aid to the faculty member, because then I could be like their friend and I could like complain with them about the homework or whatever, like I'd be able to sympathize with them, but instead I gotta be like, "Yeah here is your homework." And I gotta get on them, because of the homework and I hate homework, so I feel bad assigning it. I'm like I don't want to have to give you guys homework, but I've got to grade you on something.

In addition when Doug was reflecting on Krista's experience during a focus group he felt that:

It is very dependent on the individual relationship you have with the person. Like Krista was saying she has someone else in her club that she knows outside of class and probably on a more personal basis than the rest of the class and say that person was slacking, it might be...I think it would be more difficult to talk to them and ask them to pick up the slack. But, I think it just depends on the situation...there is like a possibility if someone gets too close they might take advantage of that friendship or personal relationship.

This statement also brings up the difficulty participants may experience when having to confront students who aren't turning in assignments, participating, or showing up to class. Lisa expressed her frustrations with having to confront students saying, "I hate...I don't like...some people it's like, 'Get on this. You gotta do it, you gotta do it.' Like it's hard to put your foot down about stuff. I just want people to do it and I don't want to mess with them." Doug echoed a similar statement sharing that he is, "a non-confrontational person to begin with and so like me being put in this role as this teacher kind of being like ahead of them or above them, makes it ten times more difficult for me to tell them that they're slacking." Dealing with students not turning in assignments is a definite source of conflict for Krista who said this during her individual interview:

It really makes me think twice before even giving them an assignment, because you know I'm thinking about a homework assignment for

them...I see it as useful for them...I want them to do it, but at the same time it's like well maybe I should cut it down a little bit, cause I don't want them to whine, because it's too much to do, so that's really just trying to figure out for myself how to balance it so that they want to do it and you know I don't want them to feel like I'm giving them too much homework.

For participants that are teaching for their second or third time achieving this balance appears easier. Four of the returning Peer Leader participants provided insight into the challenges they still encounter, but have felt much more prepared to deal with during their second year. Stacy shared how changes in the types of assignments, means of clarifying expectations and establishing respect have made grading less frustrating this year. Doug provided similar insights saying, "I think we played it cool and it was our first time teaching...so we tried to be cool and be their friend you know, definitely too much, because they didn't show up and then I had to send this Nazi email that was like, 'Don't think that I won't fail you!' to them and then that got them angry at me, but then they showed up for the rest of classes, so it worked, but I didn't like doing it." This experience definitely helped him change his approach to teaching for the second time. Participants in the second year or more have the benefit of experience, but all participants face the balancing act of being a fellow student and an instructor. The opportunity for conflict while achieving this balance centers on their teaching responsibilities, relationship with students, and the image and purpose they associate with certain roles.

*Theme 3: Participants Developed Skills and Knowledge for Teaching and Life*

Participants possess different skills and levels of knowledge for teaching prior to and after their Odyssey experience. However, there are areas of similarity among participants' comments, including feeling more confident in communication and group facilitation skills, learning about the planning and organization skills that teaching requires, as well as increasing knowledge about the institution. Additionally, stepping into the role of instructor gave many participants a greater understanding of what teaching a class involves, often resulting in a greater appreciation for their own professors.

Many participants noted feeling more confident about public speaking skills. "My speaking skills have gotten better. I still don't like to speak in front of people," said Robert, but he added "I just need to realize its okay to screw up and laugh at yourself." Jasmine also saw this experience as one that would help her improve her public speaking skills. "I get really nervous and that's part of the reason I wanted to do this was to get over my fear. You know, make myself have to do it. And I've really gotten a lot more comfortable," she said. Lisa also felt increasingly comfortable speaking in front of groups sharing that, "I've kind of calmed down about talking in front of people. It used to make me nervous, but once I'm there I'm fine, so I've kind of calmed down about it and it's not really a big deal anymore."

Not only did participants express an increase in their ability to speak to groups, but some also felt they were more aware of how they were communicating with others. Kyle noted that her communication skills have improved through:

Learning how to interact and communicate with varying students. It's probably one of the most diverse groups I've worked with, just because a lot of the other organizations I've worked with there are usually common interests or common goals and this is pretty like, there aren't a lot of commonalities other than we're all Oregon State students.

Doug thought he was becoming more aware of what he was saying while in front of his class noting that, "Some of my sarcastic sense of humor might go out the window when I'm in the classroom, cause you have to remain pretty much neutral you don't want to say anything that would upset or offend anybody."

Lack of planning or mistakes participants made actually proved helpful in terms of learning about organizing activities and overall class preparation. Willow remembers the mistakes she and her co-instructor made during her first year teaching. "My assignments were really disorganized, because I didn't know where anything was. Half the time the students turned in the stuff to him, the other half the time they turned the stuff in to me...just being as disorganized as we were last year, helped ridiculously this year."

Sometimes classes or situations not happening as planned also forced participants to learn how to think on their feet, adapt quickly, and change their perspective. Lisa expressed frustration at a situation where a guest speaker canceled. "They called me like two hours before to let me know they couldn't do it. And I was like, 'Are you kidding me?' So we get there and I'm kind of like, great, you know? I ran off a bunch of copies and a bunch of things, but I don't want to sit there and read papers to them that they can

read on their own.” Through similar experiences Jasmine realized that, “You’ve got to be able to keep things rolling smoothly and be able to pick things up if something doesn’t happen. Sometimes if everyone stops talking I’m like, ‘Okay now what do I say?’ ” Jesse learned to react quickly when her students didn’t react as she had hoped. “We’ve had guest speakers and they’re like, ‘What do you guys think?’ And it’s just like dead silence, like you hear the background noise...the speakers have even looked at me like, ‘What do I do?’ And so I’ve tried to kind of jump in.” For Jessica a situation with two students who had missed class turned out differently than she had been anticipating leading her to change her perspective. “I’ve never had that much happen in a 30 second period that was so 180 (degrees) from what I thought was going to happen,” she noted during a focus group.

Realizing the challenges related to class planning and preparation, grading, and lack of student participation, many participants echoed a growing appreciation for their own professors or teachers. Kyle shared during a focus group conversation her increased appreciation for one of her professors:

I have a political science professor who typed out a page worth of notes for me about my paper. Like I so much more appreciate that now. I’m just like, “Wow, she actually spent the time to correct 35 papers and handwrite feedback.” Who does that? I much more appreciate everything from professors. I couldn’t imagine doing that. I have 19 students and it’s just like, “Agh.” I couldn’t imagine. It’s very challenging.

Other students noted similar realizations about the time and effort involved in teaching including Jesse who said during her individual interview that,

It's a lot harder than I thought it would be. It is a lot of work and it gives me a lot of respect for people who do it, because it is hard. It's hard to always be on top of it every minute and if they have questions you've got to respond to them. And before their assignment is due you can't put it off like you can put off homework the night before, because you have to get it back to them, so they can do it the night before. So, it's really tough to procrastinate.

Doug believed teaching a class gave him, "a big, big newfound respect for teachers and the amount effort, especially the amount of outside time that goes into it, it's not just they show up and their syllabus and everything magically appears." Additionally, Megan expressed her appreciation for other students assisting in academic instruction. "I can totally understand how TAs (teaching assistants) get. My physics TA didn't have my homework last week and I was like, 'I hear you dude.' "

In addition to the work involved grading papers or responding to student emails and questions, participants also commented on the feeling and experience of being a teacher up in front of a class. Krista said during her individual interview that, "I really kind of understand now why if I'm in a class and people are talking in the back corner, you know the teacher really can see and it's just frustrating." Others noted how tired they felt after being "on-the-spot" for an entire class period. "I was tired, I mean it was fun I loved it, but I'd get out of my class and just be like, 'Whew.' You know, just because

being on the spot for an hour and twenty minutes is just something I'm not used to," said Jessica during a focus group discussion. Megan added, "I think I learned how it feels to be the one in front. You know my mom's a teacher and she always used to tell me, 'Teachers have feelings too.' ...And boy is that true, you know...it's too bad more students couldn't see that, because it's a very new experience when you're in charge."

While many participants' comments confirmed an understanding for the challenges of being a professor, Krista also expressed an understanding of the joys of teaching. "I can understand how my mom feels now, because she taught for 15 years. It's just this bond like you want to see them succeed, almost like they're your kids or something. It's a great feeling that I helped 22 students get oriented to OSU," she noted.

While teaching a class designed to orient new students to college and more specifically Oregon State, many participants realized that teaching information or planning tours related to campus resources and services helped increase their own OSU knowledge. "It feels like you're taking Odyssey again too, but from a different angle. You still get to do all those things and learn all the things again," said Robert. Having to plan classes based on OSU helped Stacy, "get to know campus and resources better, because I have to do the research as to what there is and where it is and things like that." Willow not only learned more about campus, but also found herself using new resources after acquiring knowledge about them:

I've actually learned a lot...well I thought I had OSU nailed before, because I took the Odyssey class, I'd been here for a year. I thought I had Odyssey nailed, but then I found out spring term while I was taking the



training course that there is a Post Office in the MU! I had no idea. Thought it was the coolest thing in the world. So, it helped me find out more about school. I actually used the Math center after I took my Odyssey class there.

Other participants also believed they knew all there was to know about OSU, but found themselves learning new things each week. Jesse realized that, “I guess there’s a lot of stuff I didn’t know about Oregon State and I thought after going to Oregon State and I’ve been here a year and I mean I knew I didn’t know everything, but there’s a lot I didn’t know.” In addition to increasing her knowledge of OSU, Jessica also felt that teaching had helped increase her contacts and relationships with members of the OSU community:

I usually know a lot of people when I’m walking around, but it’s really funny, I feel like I have this new layer of people that I know, staff and students, so I think that’s probably been one of the most valuable parts of this whole process. It’s just increased my involvement in the university, this one little class, cause all of the sudden I’ve contacted all these different places because of my class, but then they know me and I know them, so I’ve just built so many more relationships over the course of this term.

Developing skills and knowledge in these areas also contributes to participants feeling successful as a Peer Leader and increasing their overall self-confidence. Now in her second year of teaching Kyle shared the following reflection. “I think mainly that I can just do it. I think a self-confidence thing, that I can actually facilitate 19 first year

students. Like, I look back on it and now I've helped about 40 students at Oregon State, so it's pretty exciting. One of the girls I taught last year is now an Odyssey teacher." For a couple participants pursuing teaching as a possible career teaching Odyssey increased their confidence or interest in that decision. "I definitely like teaching a lot and like this class has kind of helped me realize that," said Stacy when reflecting on the benefits of her teaching experience. Krista felt that, "Since I did this, I think I'll be a decent teacher, because I do want to teach eventually, be a professor of physical therapy. The fact that I got through this okay, you know it's a first step teaching this class, so I'll have this to build on."

Additionally, self-reflection on the experience helped some participants become more knowledgeable about how they've changed from arriving as a freshman to a now being a sophomore, junior or senior. Lisa noted that, "Dealing with just that small of age gap, yet they're equal enough in age to you, but they're not. And I've been through those four years of college and it's just, you learn so much in four years or three years. So, I think that shines through a lot, just those few years of being here on your own." Doug saw a similar difference now that he is teaching it for a second year. "I've learned more about myself as a college student, so I think I have more to give back and explain this year, but at the same time it's kind of difficult to think back you know...not that it was that long ago, but I think there is a big difference between a year and two years," he said.

Overall, participants potentially take away a variety of new skills, knowledge, and perspective from their teaching experience, perhaps the most notable being their new realizations about teaching and an increased appreciation for the own professors.

## Discussion

When I started the research process my original questions sought to understand how undergraduates felt about their role as a peer instructor in a first-year seminar. I hoped to learn about their experiences related to this role, identify potential conflict that could arise from being a student and a teacher, and how they might resolve such conflict. From the beginning I thought certain teacher responsibilities such as grading and assigning homework could prove to be challenging, especially as participants tried to serve in helping roles. However, what I did not see right away was the relationship dimension of their experience and how that, tied to such roles and responsibilities, created the greatest potential for conflict. This dynamic and the connections with applicable theories are the focus of the following discussion.

### *Discussion of Results*

Participants sought out helping roles and those that would encourage students' success such as resource and friend. Perhaps, this is in part because they were already familiar with how to perform these roles as they often would in other leadership positions, with members of their own peer group and close friends. Participants also recognize the importance of success in college, especially related to getting involved in co-curricular activities. The ability to influence students' involvement through the roles of resource and friend and as an example of a successful college student are seen by participants as beneficial to first-year students, but it also proved to be a rewarding and validating experience for them to serve in these roles. According to Astin (1968), "the potential impact of the peer environment becomes apparent when one realizes the great

variety of roles” (p. 15) that students can engage in with each other, including adviser and friend. In addition, students are both influenced by and a source of influence for their peers. For that reason, participants’ positions are designed to be an intentional source of influence as a successful college student, but participants are also influenced by the interactions with students in their courses.

In addition to interaction with peers, participants’ learning and personal growth associated with this experience is also related to the quality and quantity of their involvement in the program (Astin, 1984). Some participants noted increased skill development in terms of communication, organization, and facilitation skills, while others saw an increase in their knowledge about teaching and the University. Perhaps, as students acquire new skills, knowledge, and relationships as a result of their involvement in peer teaching it will build their confidence to pursue other leadership opportunities, as well as influence their involvement in campus community. As Jessica noted, “It’s just increased my involvement in the university, this one little class, cause all of the sudden I’ve contacted all these different places because of my class, but then they know me and I know them, so I’ve just built so many more relationships over the course of this term.” Astin’s (1999) theory supports the idea that “the greater the interaction with peers, the more favorable the outcome” (p. 590). Therefore, as participants have opportunities to interact as a resource, friend or role model, not only are they assisting new students, but they are also developing skills, knowledge, and confidence, while becoming more successful in their role as a Peer Leader.

Yet, as seen through participants' comments, not all roles are familiar to them and navigating the boundaries of the relationship between friend and authority proved to be challenging to many participants. Students are used to administrators, faculty, and advisors being the authority figures in college. Often students associate certain images with these authority figures, particularly faculty, in terms of their age level, expertise, and power, usually in terms of issuing grades. For participants, transitioning into the role of peer instructor shifted some of these characteristics to them. Participants that may associate level of expertise and age with an authority role were challenged to think beyond this paradigm when serving as an expert to students their same age or older. As was noted by Jasmine when she commented that, "it's kind of weird, because they are actually older than I am to be getting like advice." Additionally, having power over student grades for the course, yet wanting to connect with students as friends and maintain a helping relationship created difficulties when students in participants' courses weren't fulfilling course requirements. Feelings of frustration or anxiety about students potentially not passing or dropping the course were expressed by many participants, especially those that had established a relationship beyond student-teacher with a failing student.

Additionally, some participants expressed wanting to "act cool" in their relationships with students, but to be taken seriously as an instructor and as an expert in the course many realized they also needed to develop a relationship based on mutual respect. If trying to be too cool or too friendly had failed and participants had then tried to be too authoritative it could be just as detrimental to establishing respect in the

relationship as Doug and Stacy learned during their first year teaching. “We tried to be cool and be their friend you know, definitely too much, because they didn’t show up and then I had to send this Nazi email that was like, ‘Don’t think that I won’t fail you,’ to them and then that got them angry at me” recalled Doug. As with any relationship, participants, such as Doug, are learning “how to express and manage feelings, how to rethink first impressions, how to share on a deeper level, how to resolve differences, and how to make meaningful commitments” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 145). Having an authority role can make the boundaries between student and teacher confusing. In the midst of this experience, as participants were navigating relationship boundaries, many started to re-think how they set-up expectations, communicate, and interact with students. For participants to be successful they must find ways to balance conflicting roles and learn to resolve feelings about these challenging situations. Learning to handle emotions and internal struggles with these dynamics, as well as possible confrontations with students, is part of developing mature interpersonal relationships for life after this experience (Chickering & Reisser).

In addition, to developing mature relationships, participants are also developing competence as they learn to resolve conflicts and communicate with students in their class. As they increase their knowledge, ability to analyze situations, and skills to facilitate group communication they are building both intellectual and interpersonal competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). For participants interested in teaching as a profession building competence and confidence in these areas also helped clarify their

purpose related to this career option. As previously noted by Stacy, “I definitely like teaching a lot and like this class has kind of helped me realize that.”

To some extent participants had anticipated their teaching experience, but may not have anticipated the transitions in their relationships with peers, roles in the classroom, or even assumptions about professors’ jobs. Many participants noted a new realization regarding the amount of work required to teach a class, from logistics to energy level, often admitting an increased appreciation for their own professor’s efforts. As noted in the review of literature on peer education programs:

Peer instructors with primary responsibility for facilitating assignments, grading, and managing a for-credit class of up to 20 students are more rare nationally than co-facilitators and peer tutors who either follow a strict script or work in close collaboration with faculty members (Henschied, 2001, p. 25).

Participants in this study would be considered more rare nationally, because of the ownership they have for their course development and facilitation, as well as the fact that most worked independently or with fellow undergraduate students rather than faculty or staff during the fall of 2003. For this reason, many participants’ assumptions about professors’ preparation for classes definitely shifted. As previously noted by Doug, “it’s not just they show up and their syllabus and everything magically appears. I mean I always kind of knew that, but I don’t think, it wasn’t exactly in the forefront of my thinking.” In addition, the degree that this experience shifted participants’ thinking about professors, relationships with students, and how to serve in multiple roles is relative to

how each participant perceives the transition. If changes occur without the individual attaching much significance to them, according to Schlossberg (1995) it would not necessarily be considered a transition. It is possible that peer educators working independently or with another peer educator may perceive a transition to an authority role more significantly or differently than those working with faculty or staff, as those professionals may take on more of the authoritative role and class planning responsibilities.

Additionally, the amount of time to feel comfortable with all dimensions of the peer educator's role will vary from participant to participant. The duration of the experience is at a minimum eight weeks, yet some may choose to participate more than once, which appears to further increase their ability to cope with the challenges of the experience. In particular, those participants teaching for the second or third time not only have previous experience to rely on, but have a better understanding of how to balance their helping relationships with an authority role, as well as handle difficult situations that may occur.

Participants' ability to cope with the challenges of transitioning to an authority role appear to vary based on: (a) their teaching situation in terms of with whom they are teaching, such as an undergraduate peer, graduate student, or faculty, if they are teaching independently, and amount of prior teaching experience; (b) their own personal skill set going into the experience and strategies for addressing challenging situations that may arise; and (c) the support they receive from a co-teacher, peer groups, supervisors, trainers, or students in the course. The difference in each of these areas for individual



participants helps explain, “why different individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 49 as cited in Evans et al., 1998). This is why it is particularly hard to determine the effect or connection between coping ability and training or previous positions and experience. Transition experiences may lead to growth, decline, or be viewed with ambivalence by the individual, but in addition to individual coping resources and abilities, peer education programs should be modeled to assist students in successfully “moving in”, “moving through”, and “moving out” of these positions (Schlossberg et al.). Schlossberg integrated the Cormier and Hackney (1993) counseling model with her transition theory to create a model to assist individuals in transition. This model, previously described in the Review of Literature, consists of the following five stages: “(1) relationship building, (2) assessment, (3) goal setting, (4) interventions, and (5) termination and follow-up” (Evans et al., p. 117).

Some of the ideas behind these stages are also applicable to support during and training prior to participants’ teaching experience, the latter of which could do the most to affect pre-experience perceptions. Perception itself plays a crucial role in how the peer educators perceive the transition, including how they go about preparing and coping. With regard to participants in this study preparation includes formal training, individual class planning, and establishing expectations and relationships with students. Ways to enhance preparation and support with regard to the previous discussion will be the focus of the upcoming recommendations section.

### *Discussion of Limitations*

Odyssey is only an eight-week course, which presented challenges in terms of scheduling and time constraints for participant interviews during their teaching experience. The need to complete individual interviews during the third and fourth week, prior to any focus groups was particularly difficult in terms of finding times to meet that would correspond with participants' and my own schedule. In fact, I had such a hard time finding a time to meet with one participant that I eventually had to remove her from the study, because she would not have been able to participate in an individual interview until after the focus groups. In addition, finding times that would accommodate many or most participants for focus groups was also very difficult. Such time constraints and scheduling challenges obviously presented a limitation in terms of achieving my optimal number of participants and interviews.

In addition, while providing a wealth of information, this study represents the experiences, opinions, and feelings of twelve peer educators. Twelve is a relatively small sample size and some researchers have suggested that no less than fifteen interviews are typical to achieve saturation (Ortiz). While I feel that my twelve individual interviews with additional focus groups were able to provide sufficient range and repetition of experiences for this study, with the above statement in mind it is possible that there is new information to be learned from this population that I was not able to obtain with only twelve participants. Additionally, participants in this study represent one peer education program at one institution. Participants' responsibilities and experiences as a peer

educator in this study may not be representative of other programs, even other peer educator positions involved in course instruction or programs for first-year students.

Another potential limitation of this study is related to participant recruitment in the research process. Ortiz (2003) has suggested that, “students who self-select to participate may be motivated by their favorable attitudes and experiences with the research topic” (p. 39). Participants who had a favorable or especially unfavorable experience as an Odyssey student or during their first teaching experience may have been more willing and interested in participating. With this in mind the twelve participants in this study may not be representative of all Odyssey Peer Leaders, as the experiences of sixty-one other Peer Leaders during fall 2003 are not included.

As noted in the Introduction while pursuing my masters degree I have been employed as a graduate teaching assistant through the Office of Student Orientation and Retention. In this position I have the responsibility of recruiting undergraduate Peer Leaders, like those participating in this study, to teach and co-teach Odyssey courses. I do not however have a supervisory role in terms of grading or evaluating selected Peer Leader’s performance. Additionally, some students that are Odyssey Peer Leaders apply for summer orientation leader positions with our office. With all of this in mind I did know some participants through our office prior to their participation in my research project, which may have caused them to respond differently to me in an interview setting. Additionally those participants that I did not know prior to beginning the research process may have also responded differently, simply because of my employment and relationship with the office that supervises their experience and assigns their final internship grade.

Finally, in qualitative research the interviewer or researcher serves almost as another method between final presentation of results and raw data from participants. Results in this study are in the form of detailed stories from participants that must be filtered into categories and themes. At times I found this created certain conflicts as I sought to accurately share the experiences of my participants and avoid biases due to my work with this program. As an example, I found myself stuck in certain paradigms related to applicable theory and literature. Originally I had a difficult time seeing the potential connections between Schlossberg's (1984, 1995) transition theory and my participants' experiences. I was accustomed to thinking of transitions in terms of first-year students and their transition to college due to the nature of my work in orientation programs. This may also be why I had a hard time recognizing the tie between participants' relationship with students and the effect this had on responsibilities and roles in the classroom. This is a personal limitation with which I have struggled as I've sought to overcome my own biases or paradigms due to my work with the Odyssey program.

### Recommendations

As stated earlier having a better understanding of the experiences of peer educators, could help to improve selection, training, and support for these student positions. With regard to the themes that emerged in this study the following recommendations correspond with training and support for peer educator positions and the opportunity for peer educators to support each other in their experiences.

As noted in the Review of Literature, Schlossberg (1995) used the Cormier and Hackney (1993) five-stage counseling model to assist adults in transition. There are areas of this model that could be applied and/or modified to assist students preparing for peer educator positions. In particular, the second stage where individuals are expected to assess their environment, internal and external resources, and current strategies for coping, also known as Schlossberg's 4 S's. Following is the third stage where individuals must set goals for themselves related to previous assessment results. These two stages, in terms of peer educator training, are critical components of position preparation, as peer educators could assess their current skills and abilities and set goals toward further skill development. Additionally, the fourth and fifth stages of this model could also provide support as peer educators go through their position experience. The concept of intervention in the fourth stage involves helping individuals generate problem-solving strategies, provide opportunities for peer support, and identify an individual's interpretation of a situation. In termination and follow-up, the supervisor or trainer could "aid the individual in reviewing what has happened so far and planning for next steps" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 117). Applying both of these stages provide additional support for peer educators beyond training, to help them cope with challenges during their experience.

Another important recommendation related to peer educator training is recognizing that training content and activities need to be specific to the roles, purpose, and responsibilities for that position and that training for one peer educator position may not be a substitute for another. Hunter and Health (2001) note, "before students begin

their position, they should first know what specific roles they will assume. These roles will vary from institution to institution, from program to program” (p. 47). While participants in this study may have been motivated to participate in Odyssey instruction as a result of other involvement, it does not appear that previous positions or trainings could replace training for the responsibilities of being a Peer Leader. As an example, I had thought that Krista’s previous experience and training as an orientation leader and student tour guide would be an excellent substitute for not taking the training class for Odyssey Peer Leaders. All three positions work with a similar age group, however, they don’t serve in the same role. Teaching Odyssey adds an authority or expert role, because students are also an instructor. Krista’s comments note feelings of conflict in terms understanding how to “be cool”, but also maintain her authority role. She even noted in her individual interview that:

I don’t know if this was covered in the (training) class, but...kind of giving pointers about how to balance you know being cool with them, but also getting them to take you seriously. That’s the only thing that I’ve really had trouble with; you know people just not thinking that they really have to do homework or have to do the assignments.

As seen by this statement previous positions and involvement while beneficial, may not replace training related to the dynamics inherent in the responsibilities, roles and relationships of peer educator positions.

When participants were able to interact and share stories and ideas during focus groups most seemed to thoroughly enjoy the experience. During one focus group a

participant started writing down what other participants were saying in her own notebook. In a sense this focus group discussion served as a support group for participants as they were able to hear about similar rewards, frustrations, realizations, and encounters with students. Prior to participating in a focus group Krista also noted:

I've had a practicum class where you know you're out doing the internship, but there's like five class periods where you actually go and talk about how things are going. It's nice to hear feedback from others. It would be nice to hear from other Odyssey instructors what's going well in their class. A lot of good ideas could come from that.

Just as in the classroom where participants are trying to build community and influence the first-year peer group, there is also a great opportunity to build a network of support among peer educators. As is the case for participants in this study, other peer educators such as tutors, workshop facilitators, or teaching assistants may not have many opportunities for interaction with fellow peer educators once their training is completed. Creating opportunities through informal or formal group meetings could be beneficial in terms of idea generation, as well as providing a supportive network of colleagues. Jessica noted the benefits of interacting with other Peer Leaders during her experience. "Running into the other teachers and stuff is really nice too, cause you just get to say, 'How was it the other day?' 'And are you still having problems with that one kid?' " she shared. In addition to support these types of group meetings also offer the opportunity for reflection on the experience. Posing questions related to the themes and ideas presented in the results of this study could be a means of engaging peer educators in critical reflection, in

a group setting or individually through journaling. Also, with the advancement of technology there are opportunities for increased e-support and reflection. Most college students are familiar with discussion boards, email, and listservs, which could provide a great opportunity for students to share their experiences on-line, since scheduling group meetings for a large number of peer educators could prove challenging and less intimidating for those individuals not as comfortable sharing in groups.

Another potential way to establish support for peers in peer education programs is to create mentoring opportunities within these programs. Mentoring is a role that peer educators are often expected to assume when working with other students, but pairing experienced peer educators with new peer educators as co-teachers or involving experienced peer educators in the training process allows a second mentoring relationship to develop. As Astin (1999) noted, “the peer group is powerful, because it has the capacity to involve the student more intensely in the educational experience” (p. 590). Perhaps then, more influential than professional staff involved in training or co-teaching are other peer educators that have been successful in their position.

However, teaching or working along side faculty or staff is another mentoring opportunity that should not be overlooked, as these professionals could provide the best example of how to perform in an authority or expert role. As noted in a review of peer educator programs, student-assisted teaching models have the potential to eliminate hierarchical structures with a greater sense of mentoring and equality between faculty and student educator (Miller, Groccia, & Miller, 2001). Through their experiences participants are trying to learn skills for conflict resolution and develop mature student-



teacher and student-student relationships. Experienced faculty and staff could be in the best position to serve as an example for peer educators of such relationships and the ways to handle confrontational situations with students. In addition both experienced peer educators and faculty or staff could provide direction and feedback to new peer educators on program or curriculum development, important skill sets and knowledge, and position logistics.

Finally, with regard to learning from current faculty or staff, as a means of ongoing training peer educators could individually connect with faculty to gather additional perspectives on teaching and working with students. This could occur midway through their own experience to help generate ideas and understand what being a professional educator or faculty member involves. For peer educators interested in teaching or training as a career this could be especially valuable.

#### Further Considerations

Following the idea of working with faculty or staff, one area of further exploration with regard to peer education programs could be how different types of responsibilities or relationships relate to a peer educator's role and potential role conflict. How does working with a faculty or staff member, instead of independently or with another student affect responsibilities, relationships and the potential for conflict, as well as their own development from establishing a student-faculty working relationship?

Furthermore, what about questions related to age-level or year in school? How does the number of years since participants' own first-year of college impact the

experience in terms of establishing relationships with students, but also in terms of increased potential for conflict if age or knowledge levels are closely related? Also, with regard to the students being assisted through peer education, how do they feel about being taught, tutored, or counseled by fellow students? Participants in this study noted that their students were often surprised to learn that another student would be their instructor, but how does the use of other undergraduate students as peer educators affect the inexperienced or assisted students' development?

Participants in this study taught either once a week for an hour and a half or twice a week for fifty minutes over the course of eight weeks. While peer education programs, even first-year seminars, vary in duration and frequency how does the amount of time spent performing in the peer educator position and in contact with students impact their ability to cope with challenges? Astin (1984) noted that involvement has both qualitative and quantitative features, but how does the amount of time spent in the experience affect the quality of the experience? Are those with higher amounts of contact more able to resolve conflicts and cope with their transition between different roles?

A further area of study to consider is a peer educator in academic disciplines. Participants in this study are instructors for first-year seminars, which focuses on both social and academic integration, but what about teaching assistants, tutors, or co-instructors in Chemistry, Engineering, or English? Or peer educators in social or co-curricular programs? How are the dynamics of other peer educator positions similar or different?

## Conclusion

While providing some valuable insights into understanding the experiences of peer educators it is important to remember that only twelve of the possible seventy-three Peer Leaders were included in this study. Most participants in this study, even with their struggles and frustrations, found the experience rewarding and noted positive benefits. Is this the same outcome for all the sixty-one Peer Leaders not participating in this study? Perhaps participating in interviews and having the opportunity to think and reflect on this topic influenced participants' development and learning in a way that other Peer Leaders would not have experienced.

With this in mind, this study is meant to provide a starting point for future research in the area of peer education programs by beginning to understand how peer educators: (1) define their role in the classroom, (2) the dynamics and challenges of the relationship between peer educator and student with regard to such roles and responsibilities, and (3) what peer educators are able to gain from this experience in terms of knowledge and skills.

With the vast array of peer education opportunities in academic and co-curricular programs further research is necessary to fully understand the experiences of peer educators in these positions, particularly how variations in responsibilities, roles, and relationships with both faculty and students, impacts their own development during college.

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APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF THE OSU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

**Principal Investigator:** Jessica White**Email:** [Jessica.White@orst.edu](mailto:Jessica.White@orst.edu)**Department:** CSSA/School of Education**Telephone:** 541-737-8576**Project Title:** Odyssey Peer Leader Research**Type of Project:** Student Project or Thesis**Student Researcher:** Maren Oates**Type of review requested:** Expedited**Project Start Date:** 9/22/03**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_**Required IRB Attachments****1. Brief Description**

The focus of this research project is to explore the experience of OSU Odyssey "Peer Leaders". OSU Odyssey (ALS 111/112) is a one-credit first-year student seminar taught mainly by successful undergraduate Peer Leaders. These undergraduates take a three-credit training course (ALS 407) prior to teaching Odyssey and receive internship credit during their teaching experience. In particular the research will focus on how these undergraduate students perceive their role(s) as an instructor to their peers and how different roles impact their teaching experience. Having a better understanding of the Peer Leader experience may help Student Orientation and Retention programs improve training courses and teaching support for future Odyssey Peer Leaders.

**2. Participant Population**

Participants in this study will be students who are teaching/co-teaching a section of OSU Odyssey (ALS 111/112) during fall term 2003. All participants will be at least 18 years of age. Participation is not restricted to a specific age, gender, or ethnic group. Purposeful sampling will be employed in choosing participants because they represent data-rich

perspectives and have interest in the success of Odyssey classes. As a researcher I realize the implications and limitations of a small and purposeful sample in terms of generalizability and accept this as a tradeoff for more meaningful and useful data.

For the purposes of this project and participant selection, participants will be considered “data rich” if they meet the following selection criteria:

- Clear understanding of the research objectives discussed above;
- Experience in individually or co-teaching ALS 111/112 OSU Odyssey fall 2003;
- Ability to openly and articulately express their opinions in both individual and group settings; and
- Interest in exploring the teaching process and their own experience.

All OSU Odyssey Peer Leaders will be invited to participate in this research project on a volunteer basis. Recruitment will take place during a mandatory Peer Leader pre-teaching meeting on September 22, 2003 organized by Student Orientation and Retention programs. The optimal number of volunteers is between fifteen and twenty Peer Leaders out of the 73 teaching Odyssey this fall. In the event that less than 15 students volunteer at the above meeting, the researcher will personally contact Peer Leaders utilizing contact information provided to the office by Student Orientation and Retention and using the same recruitment script as in the above meeting (see Attachment A). Also, in the event that more than 20 students volunteer, the researcher will select participants based on the degree to which they meet the criteria outlined above.

### **3. Methods and Procedures**

The general sequence of events for data collection during fall term 2003 is outlined below. Any proposed changes will be submitted to IRB for approval before they are implemented.

1. The researcher will establish and maintain a researcher log for the purpose of noting impressions, questions, concerns, and ideas regarding the research process.
2. At a mandatory Odyssey Peer Leader meeting on September 22, 2003 all students will be invited to fill out a brief questionnaire taking approximately five minutes to complete (see Attachment B). An informed consent document will be attached to the questionnaire for each participant to review, ask questions about, and sign their copy if they decide to participate (see Attachments C). All questionnaires will be returned to the researcher directly and then destroyed upon completion of the research project.
3. Also, taking place during this meeting will be the recruitment of participants for interviews during fall term. The recruitment script to be used at this

meeting is included as Attachment A. A sign up sheet will be passed around for participants to provide contact information if they are interested in participating.

4. Fifteen to twenty participants will be invited to participate in both an individual interview (approximately 60 minutes) and a group interview (approximately 60-90 minutes). Each group interview will include 5-8 participants. All interviews will take place during fall term 2003. Prior to participating in either interview, each participant will be asked to review the informed consent document for the interview portion of this study, discuss their understanding of the research project, and sign their copy if they decide to participate.

An audio recording device will be used to record participants' comments during group and individual interviews. The use of audio recording is simply to aid in the collection of data. Tapes will be kept in a locked container/cabinet to which only the researcher will have access. The researcher will transcribe all tapes containing data for this research project. All tapes used in data collection will be destroyed upon completion of the research project.

Data collection will only be gathered through the questionnaire and interviews outlined above. The questionnaire used in this study is included as Attachment B. Since the interviews are intended to be somewhat open-ended and emergent, questions used to frame the group and individual interviews are as follows:

- Please describe your Odyssey teaching experience
- What has been the most challenging and rewarding part of the experience?
- What about your Odyssey teaching experience is most and least satisfying for you?
- What do you feel your role(s) is as an Odyssey instructor?
- What role(s) do you feel most and least comfortable with as an Odyssey instructor?
- How do you communicate your role(s) (or expectations) to students in your class?

#### 4. Risks

Participants will have the opportunity to participate in interviews that will require an additional time commitment of up to 3 hours during fall term 2003, which may take time away from other commitments.

It should also be noted that participant's grade or final evaluation as an Odyssey instructor (ALS 410 internship credits) will **not** be affected by participation and therefore will **not** be a risk related to participation in this research project. Participants will always

have the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time and discuss any concerns with the researcher.

### **5. Benefits**

Participants will have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the teaching process. In turn this may help them more aware and able to evaluate their own teaching methods and experience.

### **6. Compensation**

Participants will not be given any compensation for participating in this research project.

### **7. Informed Consent Process**

See attached.

### **8. Anonymity or Confidentiality**

Participants' identities will remain anonymous on the initial surveys distributed. For those who choose and are selected to participate in the interview portion of the research project, their participation will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Identities of interview participants will not be divulged to anyone, including SOAR staff members or other non-participating Peer Leaders.

Since participation is voluntary, participants have the option to share to the degree they feel comfortable and to withdraw from the study at any time. Students do not have to include their names nor will they be asked their names on audio recordings at any time. In any reports for this research project participants will be identified as "participant 1, participant 2, etc...".

Participants will be informed of the above information at the time of recruitment and in reviewing the informed consent documents.

### **9. Attachments (See additional appendix)**

## APPENDIX B

### Recruitment Script

The following script will be read by Maren Oates to all fall term 2003 Odyssey Peer Leaders during a pre-teaching mandatory meeting on September 22, 2003.

Researcher:

“My name is Maren Oates and I am a graduate assistant for the Office of Student Orientation and Retention, as well as a graduate student in the College Student Services Administration program. I am here today to let you know about a research project I am conducting this fall.

As all of you are aware Odyssey (ALS 111/112) is OSU’s first-year student seminar taught primarily by Peer Leaders. This fall I will be conducting research in an effort to explore your experience as an Odyssey Peer Leader and understand the challenges or rewards that come with this opportunity.

It is my hope that having a better understanding of your experience will help Student Orientation and Retention programs improve training courses and teaching support for future Peer Leaders.

I am inviting all Odyssey Peer Leaders for ALS111/112 who wish to volunteer to participate in this research project to indicate your interest by signing the sheet that I am now passing around.

Please know that participating in this research project will require a time commitment of up to 3 hours during fall term 2003. This includes 5 minutes for the pre-experience survey, 60 minutes for individual interviews, and 60-90 minutes for group interviews.

If you agree to participate you will have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the teaching process. In turn this may help you become more aware and able to evaluate your own teaching methods and experience.

Finally, you have the option to not volunteer for this opportunity without penalty of any kind. All Odyssey Peer Leaders – regardless of whether they participate in the research project – will receive ALS 410 internship credits upon successfully teaching Odyssey (ALS 111/112). It should also be noted that if you do agree to participate your grade or final evaluation as an Odyssey instructor (ALS 410 internship credits) will **not** be affected by participation and therefore will **not** be a risk related to participation in this research project. You will always have the opportunity to withdraw from this study at any time and discuss any concerns with me.

Thank you for listening. I’m happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.”

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Documents

#### Pre-teaching questionnaire

Project Title: Odyssey Peer Leader Research  
Principal Investigator: Jessica White, CSSA/School of Education, Oregon State University  
Research Staff: Maren Oates, Graduate Student, Oregon State University

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences of OSU Odyssey Peer Leaders. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are an Odyssey Peer Leader during fall term 2003. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. **This informed consent document is for your records.**

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate, please fill out the attached questionnaire regarding your expectations for teaching OSU Odyssey (ALS 111/112). It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. You are free to skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer. When you are finished please return the questionnaire to the researcher. If you decide not to participate, please return the incomplete survey to the researcher.

#### **RISKS & BENEFITS**

There are no foreseeable risks or personal benefits for the participants of this questionnaire.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

#### **QUESTIONS**

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Jessica White (541)737-8576 or by email at [Jessica.White@orst.edu](mailto:Jessica.White@orst.edu) or Maren Oates (541)737-9812 or by email at [Maren.Oates@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Maren.Oates@oregonstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu).

## Interviews and Focus Groups

Project Title: Odyssey Peer Leader Research  
 Principal Investigator: Jessica White, CSSA/School of Education, Oregon State University  
 Research Staff: Maren Oates, Graduate Student, Oregon State University

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences of OSU Odyssey Peer Leaders. You are invited to participate in this research study because you are an Odyssey Peer Leader during fall term 2003. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

### **PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate, your involvement will only be during fall term 2003. During fall term you will be asked to engage in one individual interview (approximately 60 minutes) and one group interview (approximately 60-90 minutes). During these interviews you will be asked questions related to your Odyssey teaching experience. You are free to skip any questions during group or individual interviews that you would prefer not to answer.

### **RISKS & BENEFITS**

Participating in individual and group interviews will require a time commitment of up to 3 hours during fall term 2003, which may take time away from other commitments.

If you agree to participate you will have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the teaching process. In turn this may help you become more aware and able to evaluate your own teaching methods and experience.

It should also be noted that your grade or final evaluation as an Odyssey instructor (ALS 410 internship credits) will **not** be affected by participation and therefore will **not** be a risk related to participation in this research project. You will always have the opportunity to withdraw from this study at any time and discuss any concerns with the researcher.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

### **AUDIO OR VISUAL RECORDING**

By initialing in the space provided, you verify that you have been told that audio recordings will be generated during the course of this study. The audio recordings are being made to



record participant's comments during individual and group interviews. Participants will be identified by a pseudonym. Only the researcher will have access to recordings. The researcher will do transcription of recordings. Tapes will be destroyed upon completion of this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Participant's initials**

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may either refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I understand that my participation will not affect my final evaluation or grade for teaching Odyssey. If I choose to withdrawal my participation from this study before it has ended I understand that data I provided may be used in reports from this study. After reading this Informed Consent Document I will be required to sign my name if I with to participate.

**QUESTIONS**

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Jessica White at (541)737-8576 or by email at [Jessica.White@orst.edu](mailto:Jessica.White@orst.edu) or Maren Oates (541)737-9812 or by email at [Maren.Oates@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Maren.Oates@oregonstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu).

My signature indicates that I have read and understand the procedures described above and give my informed and voluntary consent to participate in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

Participant's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## APPENDIX D

1. Why did you choose to become an Odyssey peer leader?
2. What are your expectations for this teaching experience?
3. What do you think will be most challenging about this experience?
4. What do you think will be most rewarding about this experience?
5. Are you teaching **individually** OR **in a team** (please circle one)?
6. Is this your first time teaching an Odyssey course (please circle one)?  
**YES**                      **NO**
7. How many years have you been going to school at OSU (please circle one)?  
**1**      **2**      **3**      **4**      **5+**

## APPENDIX E

## Letter of Approval from SOAR program

August 18, 2003

Office of Budgets & Institutional Research  
510 Kerr Administration Building  
Corvallis, OR 97331-2125

RE: Odyssey Peer Leader Research

This letter is to confirm my support for the Odyssey student instructor research that Maren Oates wishes to conduct using support from the Office of Student Orientation and Retention. I will review the plans for conducting research and will offer the needed support and information for successful data collection. Each Odyssey Peer Leader will be allowed to make his or her own decision whether or not to participate.

This valuable research will assist our office in improving the training provided and teaching experience for future Odyssey instructors.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 541-737-0582 or by email [Kris.Winter@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Kris.Winter@oregonstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Kris Winter  
Program Coordinator, Student Orientation and Retention  
Coordinator, First Year Experience (OSU Odyssey)