



Peer Leader Alumni Reflections: Advancing Visibility and Reach of Peer-Led Team Learning Panel from the 2021 PLTLIS Conference

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Peer Leader Alumni Reflections: Advancing Visibility and Reach of Peer-Led Team Learning

Panel from the 2021 PLTLIS Conference

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Abstract

Calculating roughly, starting in 1992 with Peer Leaders from “Workshop Chemistry” at the City College of New York, Peer-led Team Learning programs may have an aggregate of perhaps 30,000 students who became Peer Leaders and are now alumni. How are Peer Leaders affected by their experiences? This paper is an edited transcription of Peer Leader Alumni panelists from the discussion at the 2021 PLTLIS Annual Conference, held online on Saturday, June 5, 2021

Keywords: Peer Leader, Alumni, Effects of Peer Leading on Students, Impact of Peer Leading, Personal Growth

Introduction

What happens after graduation for Peer Leaders? How are Peer Leaders affected by their experiences? A comprehensive study about what happens next as Peer Leader Alumni would be of great significance. Calculating roughly, by including Peer Leaders from “Workshop Chemistry” which started in 1992 at the City College of New York, the predecessor to Peer-led Team Learning, there may be about 30,000 students who became Peer Leaders and are alumni by now. There have been numerous campuses that have had programs, some of them small, some of them big, and there are many campuses that have had a PLTL program for 20 or more years. That represents a multitude of students who have become Peer Leaders and there are a lot of stories as a result. This paper is a transcription of Peer Leader Alumni panelists from the discussion at the 2021 PLTLIS Annual Conference, held online on Saturday, June 5, 2021.

The panelists at the Ninth Annual Conference of the Peer-Led Team Learning International Society (PLTLIS) were:

- Leslie Cervantes, Peer Leader in Chemistry, University of Texas at El Paso
- Chinedu Chukuigwe, Peer Leader in Chemistry, the City College of New York, CUNY
- Melissa Greenlee, Peer Leader in Computer Science, University of Houston Downtown
- Milka O. Montes, Peer Leader in Chemistry, University of Texas at El Paso
- AT Turchaninova, Peer Leader in Mathematics, University of Houston Downtown
- YiMing Yu, Peer Leader in Mathematics, New York City College of Technology, CUNY
- Nicole Vargas, Peer Leader in Biology, Florida International University
- David Zarate, Peer Leader in Chemistry, San Jose City College

Milka Montes, Moderator

I am currently an Associate Professor and Chair of Chemistry at University of Texas Permian Basin. I am also the President-elect for PLTLIS which is an honor and a big responsibility but I’m very excited to be here, especially because I’m a former Peer Leader as well. My Peer Leader experience was pivotal to my decision to become an academician and primed me to make the right moves every step of the way to my current career.

Madeline Adamczeski, San Jose City College (SJCC)

The relationships that I developed with the Peer Leaders and that they develop with me are just lifelong. And it's not like we're in constant communication but whenever they reach out to me, or I reach out to them it's like no time has been in between. "Do you remember me?" Of course, I remember you. You always remember your Peer Leaders because you write two or three-page recommendations. Thank you.

Mitsue Nakamura, University of Houston Downtown (UHD)

Melissa was already so mature when she came to UHD and she just stepped into the leading role right away and she also helped my colleague, Ongard Sirisaengtaksin, to create the actual workshop material when we were starting a workshop in computer science. She was very instrumental in many different ways, in mentoring the younger ones, helping with the computer science and math ideas and so she's one of those in my group that got me so spoiled.

Then came AT and AT doesn't like me to say this but she came to us when she was a 14-year-old, so I was her second "mom." I was kind of worried how she was going to be able to mingle because she had been homeschooled, but she just melted in with all the Peer Leaders and all of her Scholars Academy members really well, as young as she was. She stepped into a lot of leading roles and even for Scholars Academy she took on a role of a senior peer mentor over many of the students quite a bit older than she was. But every task we gave her, she was just very instrumental. She graduated with a double major in Computer Science and Math but she's now studying Physics. And no matter what I asked her to do and again and again all these students who took peer leading roles or leading roles, all my Peer Leaders, they got me so spoiled. And I learned how to delegate really fast. Thank you for being here and I am looking forward to hearing your stories.

Jose Alberte, Florida International University (FIU)

I can talk about Nicole. Good morning, everyone. So, Nicole is, or was, my right hand, literally my right hand for a long time; I think that that describes the importance that she had to our program down in Miami. And from here on she will always be part of our family. So, I'll let Nicole shine on her own, but I miss you Nicole.

Nicole Vargas

I miss you too, Jose.

Jim Becvar, University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)

I wanted to mention to Leslie that there have been 491 Peer Leaders in general chemistry during the time we've had Peer-Led Team Learning at UTEP. Many of them have served multiple semesters like Leslie and I'm very proud of every one of them, so I certainly am looking forward to listening to what everyone has to say.

Milka Montes

Thank you for the introductions. If you have questions or comments, please add them on the chat or you can raise your hand on Zoom. I'm going to ask the panelists to introduce themselves: Please tell us your name, the year or decade that you were a Peer Leader and where you are now.

Chinedu Chukuigwe

I am in New York. I was a Peer Leader in the 2000s, I worked with AE Dreyfuss for quite a while. It was a great experience. It actually led me into everything that I did after that. I tried to go into leadership in the form of how PLTL works, as a facilitator as opposed to just telling people you must do this but more as a support for the folks that I lead. I am currently an engineering management consultant for some tech firms that you may have heard of, Airbnb, Squire technologies...that's in a nutshell.

Nicole Vargas

I was a Peer Leader at Florida International University in Miami. I started in 2013. At some point I became a Research Assistant with PLTL as well, probably in 2014. I was also the Chair of Outreach so I would handle the website and marketing and group activities that we would do for bonding and stuff like that. Currently I am a Biology teacher for a charter high school close to Miami.

David Zarate

I was a Peer Leader from 2011 to 2012 for two semesters. The good news is I have recently been accepted to medical school, so I'll be starting in July. I am currently in Modesto, California. I've been back from Arizona for about a year now and I've been working as a Hemodialysis Technician. It's definitely been a journey to get up to this point in pursuing medical school.

Leslie Cervantes

I was a Peer Leader at UTEP from 2010 to 2012 in First Semester General Chemistry. I was also Head Peer Leader in 2011 to 2012. I participated in the [Posters on the Hill](#) event in 2012. Currently I am an immigration attorney. I practice family-based immigration law at a firm in Boston.

AT Turchaninova

Hi, I'm AT. I am currently a graduate student in Physics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I study the first second of the universe and dark matter. I was a Peer Leader at UHD, University of Houston-Downtown with Miss Nakamura from about 2013 to 2017. I overlapped with Melissa for a couple of years. As Ms. Nakamura mentioned I was also in our STEM Scholarship organization, Scholars Academy, served as a Peer Mentor and the Senior Peer Mentor Program, all of which were very interrelated facilitation-related roles that I really enjoyed.

YiMing Yu

I was a Peer Leader from 2009 to 2013 until I graduated from New York City College of Technology, City University of New York. Currently I'm a research scientist at Georgia Tech Research Institute, so I'm doing research on machine learning and algorithm development. I'm an immigrant and the first child to go to college in my family.

Melissa Greenlee

I was a peer mentor, Peer Leader starting in 2011 through 2014. And like AT said, I was also a Peer Mentor for the Scholars Academy which is a very similar kind of role in the sense of mentoring and leading. Currently I work for Microsoft as a software engineer in the greater Boston area.

Milka Montes

Thank you. Those are really interesting ventures that you're all doing, from being an immigration lawyer to an applied mathematician, adult future doctor and like a future crazy scientist, this is super exciting and of course the business world as well.

My first question: Can you talk to us about your experiences as a Peer Leader and any challenges that you encountered as a Peer Leader?

David Zarate

One of the challenges being a Peer Leader was having the confidence to teach and explain the material to other students because you don't really find out what you don't know until you try to teach it to somebody else. You kind of get stuck - you're like, oh my gosh - you kind of freeze up during the workshops. And one of the learning techniques and the tools that our mentors have taught us is that we don't know everything, nobody knows everything and it's okay to go back and reference the books or go ask for help or go ask another Peer Leader or our mentors for help. So, it was definitely developing that confidence and being able to not just lead the sessions but working hand in hand with the students and with their mentors and it's okay to use your resources. There's nothing wrong with that and there's nothing wrong with not knowing an answer to something. So, I think just the experience as a Peer Leader really helped with confidence and learning how to use the resources around you.

Nicole Vargas

I would definitely say that one of the challenges that I experienced as a Peer Leader was the fact that I was typically much younger than the people in my session and that was always a problem for some people, even [later] as an adjunct instructor. When I was teaching at FIU, I was always typically much younger than the people in my classes and people have a little bit of a struggle with authority when the student is the older person but doesn't have that knowledge level. It's interesting what David was saying about not having all the answers because I did use that to my advantage even if I did have the answers. I would let them figure it out, just throw it back at them, "Yeah, I know, but what do you know?" "How can you tell me?" "We're all here to learn. I know it, I'm here to guide you to learn it." So, the challenge for me was the age thing, not so much the actual information and I'm sure other Peer Leaders have a similar experience.

Chinedu Chukuigwe

I would say for me, one major challenge in the beginning was wanting to teach all the time and just tell people what to do and sometimes even trying to solve the problem for them. But as I got better as a facilitator, I started learning to just facilitate as opposed to teaching. So, I've carried that along throughout my career where you're helping people meet their own potential but you're not trying to do it for them because they can get better if they do it themselves as opposed to if you were the one trying to say just do it this way, do it that way, or even do it for them.

AT Turchaninova

I want to jump in on that topic and I was going to give a different take on this question. Within PLTL, I totally agree with what everyone has said and especially with this question of wanting to teach and overcoming that instinct and facilitating instead. But what I've encountered since I'm not at an institution [UNC] that specifically does PLTL, but I am a teaching assistant. And I also worked as a tutor in between undergrad and grad school and the challenges that I've been encountering since then are wanting to apply PLTL methods in situations where people don't expect them, or they don't want them. You might want it to be the best thing for the situation, but they might not be. For example, with high schoolers who are just so stressed or UNC undergraduates who are also just so stressed. And when they are not expecting you to facilitate them through a problem rather than just directly helping them it can be really difficult to mediate that emotionally because people react very strongly to not receiving help in the way that they're expecting when they're struggling. So, I've been thinking a lot about that, and I don't have a good answer except for changing it kind of on a larger scale so that it is more common to be sort of guided through a problem rather than being helped directly in the 'just give the answer' way, but that's a struggle that I've experienced lately

Melissa Greenlee

To tack on to what AT just said was that I think one of the biggest challenges of being a Peer Leader was she mentioned students come in with the expectation to receive help but not be facilitated through that experience of finding the answer on their own, and I think that was one of the challenges as a Peer Leader was being able to change that expectation that they have of the sessions when they come in because they may not necessarily know what PLTL is. They think they're coming for tutoring but it's more of an experience and I think the biggest challenge is getting them to the point where they want to figure out the answer on their own and be able to and ask those questions that will lead them to that discovery on their own as opposed to us as Peer Leaders just saying, "Well this is the next step that you do," absolutely.

But as far as experience as a Peer Leader, the one thing I do want to throw out is that it was probably one of the "funnest" times I've had during my undergraduate career. Being able to go into that lab and hang out with other Peer Leaders like AT and some of the other ones that we had in there and then have the students come in who are also coming into this little community in our little lab that only sat about 25 people, but it was like the place to go hang out during the day and either socialize or work on problems. Nobody ever had a question or a problem that could not be addressed. All you had to do was just stand up: "Does anybody

know about such and such?" and then there'd be two or three people who would just chime in, and it would be like, "Yeah, let's work on it."

YiMing Yu

I also thought about my experience at City Tech. The PLTL program at City Tech is a very supportive and educated community. We come from different backgrounds, and we have different strengths and weaknesses, and we train to become a Peer Leader. There are two big sections in here. One part is that we trained to be a Peer Leader: We're taking classes, we write articles, make posters, and presentations. So, it's challenging for me to write articles and presentations. I got a lot of help from AE Dreyfuss. The other part is having your own workshop and you're doing some active learning, applying what you learned in the [training] class to facilitate there. I also think like David: Training being a leader in the sense that you want to help the student think independently and then help them to learn from each other. And the challenging part of that is how to make the student trust you and your answers quickly and starts to ask you more questions. My strategy is that I kind of give away answers at the beginning to build trust and later I become more hands-on so they were starting to figure out their own solutions and think independently and help them out if it is needed. Being open to understand their ideas and try to help them to see if their answers were working or not. It's also helping to manage the good dynamics. The students asking each other, questioning the group, and helping. The other challenge for me is, like I mentioned, that I'm an immigrant so when I started PLTL, I didn't speak English very well so the training process to explain things, I understand it, but I don't know how to explain it. I understand math well, so I always try using a concise language that is easy for students to understand.

Milka Montes

Thank you! Even though it has been probably 20 years ago, the challenges seem to be the same and the experiences too, so that's really good. I'm really happy that you're here telling us about your story.

Now the next question is, **Would you tell us how the experience of being a Peer Leader helped you individually in other classes that you took and how this experience influenced your post-graduation activities and choices?** It's a two-part question.

Nicole Vargas

In other classes that I took, first of all, if it was a Biology class, there was a PLTL workshop for that class also. I was a leader, but I was also in PLTL sessions at the same time in classes that had nothing to do with the classes I was leading, especially during my master's degree. I basically learned to have no fear when it came to having to get something and put it together, and doing a presentation, or working in a group, or dealing with different types of people. As a leader you have to learn how to mold the students into working together. Not everyone is comfortable working in a group or in a team session. You have to be vulnerable because you have to be willing to make mistakes and say things that are wrong. Especially in a PLTL session because students don't always know the answers and they're not always going to go down the exact path that they need in order to get to the answer. So, I took that and kind of transferred it over to other areas of my life, that aspect of transfer is a big one for me. I always felt that I could use the tips and tools that I got as a leader in other aspects of my life. Whether that was writing a paper or doing a presentation or simply putting something together I just always had that in the back of my mind.

The second part of the question, how has it impacted my post-graduation activities? I did not think I was going to be a teacher, especially a Biology teacher, at any point in time. You can ask Jose about that, I was going to do Organizational Psychology or something else, but I'm pretty set now. I'm getting my Ph.D. in curriculum instruction so that's probably where I will be and it's pretty much because of PLTL because I had no idea, I liked education and educational research as much as I did until Jose gave me the opportunity to be a Research Assistant for him.

Leslie Cervantes

I think one of the most valuable tools that I learned as a Peer Leader was learning to command a room. And like Nicole said, especially when sometimes you're the youngest person in the classroom, learning to command the room and engage everybody. That really helped me post-graduation as an attorney when I obviously represent people who are significantly older than me or I'm going toe to toe with attorneys who are significantly older and more experienced than I am. Learning to have that confidence in yourself and what you know and learning to command the room and obtain that respect from your peers and people that are there.

Chinedu Chukuigwe

For me, outside of the classes that had PLTL, I tried to sort of mimic PLTL in those classes to do better because I realized that was really helping me to get better grades. I think I even tried to get, I don't remember if it's in engineering or mathematics at City College, I tried to get them to adopt PLTL more from an institutional standpoint. Then after school I've still used that same role of just being a facilitator, being a leader, being able to engage people who, in terms of technical ability are probably even better than me, but still even help them to come together and work together and when working together do something greater than they could do themselves.

Melissa Greenlee

As far as the experiences in my other classes, we learned how to ask questions to facilitate our mentees' thoughts and how they think about the problem, and I think that helped me in coming up with the questions that I needed to ask when I was looking for help in my other classes. Like, "How do I ask this question?", "What point am I trying to get?", "What point, what am I not understanding?" and "How do I communicate that with the person that I'm asking that from as well?" As far as post-graduation activity and choices, I use the methods from PLTL fairly regularly. As part of the process of being an engineer at Microsoft one of the things that we're expected to do is to mentor and bring up other junior engineers and being able to teach them to ask the questions themselves and come up with the solutions themselves instead of us just telling them, because if I just tell you the answers or things like that then it doesn't help you grow as an engineer. So, that really is something we definitely use on a fairly regular basis when we have junior engineers that come in that need to get up to speed or learn this other new thing that we've been working on. And so, I think it's something that carries through for the rest of your life actually.

AT Turchaninova

I totally agree with what everyone has said about carrying it over to other classes, so I'll just address the second part of the question about postgraduate activities. So, I am currently, for each of my four semesters in grad school so far, I've been a teaching assistant for the introductory Physics, calculus-based Physics, class at UNC where we do something called a "studio." So, students go to lecture and then they also attend studio twice a week which is kind of a combined lab-recitation. It is not a PLTL workshop but there are a lot of elements in it, most of what we do in it is facilitate group work with students, so they work in groups on experiments and worksheets and analyzing data and our job as the "teaching

assistants” is to facilitate that group work. And that course also was created and is supported by the Physics education research group at UNC, which not every Physics department has such a strong education research group. And that definitely influenced my choice of department. I have definitely found myself as a TA for this course trying to implement PLTL methods and also being able to communicate with the folks in the education research group much more directly than I would have been if I didn't have my PLTL experience about our teaching methods and our materials and what would be better pedagogically for the students. So, I'm really excited to keep moving that in a more PLTL direction.

YiMing Yu

I would say being a Peer Leader changed my life dramatically. So, before I was a Peer Leader, I was working in a bakery; then my first job in helping people in academics was being a Peer Leader. The PLTL experience showed that I can use my mathematical knowledge to do something meaningful. As an undergrad, it takes so much time, but somebody said you don't get that much time like when you're working on something. Again, in your classes in your math, and reinforcing your learning, that's awesome. And also, after holding my workshops and talking to people and working with groups and people also, I feel my confidence increased in talking in front of people. Guiding me how I should learn the material, broader and more in depth so I can explain the material better. Another thing that comes with being a Peer Leader is the network. I get introduced to other people, with other professors working on research, I get into the summer program and that's also helping me for my going to grad school. Also, I get a lot of help from AE Dreyfuss. She's the one helping me with all my pronunciation, today you can hear me clearly because she helped me during the summer there, and also helped me to write my personal statement which actually made it possible to apply for grad school and fill out applications.

As far as how they affect my choices, I enjoyed being a Peer Leader, so I intended to go to grad school to be a professor but now I'm kind of changing along the way. So, during grad school it does help me a lot, I have classes that I have become a TA in, so I know I'm struggling between wanting to teach and doing a PLTL [program], but I still like more enforcing on the PLTL-active learning way, so I feel this is a better way to learn. And the students get to learning themselves because as a teaching assistant, sometimes we are not supposed to teach but we teach when we know that the student doesn't know how to do the problem.

At this moment, I'm working at Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI), so we have master's students also working with an undergrad student, so PLTL definitely impacts how I

interact with the people. Being a Peer Leader, I might emphasize being a peer, so I try to pretend to be a peer even though I still look young. So, I want to try to blend into the environment and be patient with the undergrad student and try to figure out what they're lacking in by providing advice and guidance and helping them. So also, I learned from my master's students how they know things that I don't know so I should learn from them. Also help sometimes, like maybe being a Peer Leader, we help the student to build their content to learn new things and be comfortable, so it also impacts how I'm taking on new projects and projects that I have never worked on and just not in my field. So, I try to be a Peer Leader myself. I just need to tell myself that I know how to do this problem and I just need to figure out where to find resources and how I should break down the problem that worked for me and understand that I can ask more questions. Thank you.

David Zarate

I would have to agree with just about everything that everybody talked about, from having more confidence in the room to being more organized to approaching new materials in a different manner. One way that peer leading has helped me was being able to approach new material with confidence, taking the tools that the program has taught me and using them for different subjects. Also being able to be disciplined to schedule, having a routine and being consistent about it. That helped me with all my other undergraduate classes. For example, I remember taking Physics at a community college and I had no idea what I was taking. I only took it because a friend of mine wanted to take it, but sure enough I ended up loving Physics. I learned how to break down the equations, I learned the concepts. It was fun and when you have fun everything's, I believe, just a little bit easier. So, with that being said, just being able to use the tools not just in the science, being able to apply it to other subjects: Genetics, Biology, Molecular Cellular Biology. It really helped me move forward.

Funny story was that my original major was Nursing and it wasn't until I took Physics that I'm like, well, maybe I can pursue something bigger, a bigger goal. And that's when I switched to pursuing medical school. It's just funny how sometimes one class or one decision can change your life course. In regard to my experience after graduation while going into medical school I know I'm going to have to use these tools again, it's going to be more rigorous, time-consuming, so I'll just be using the same methods that we all used in Peer-Led programs.

Milka Montes

Awesome! Thank you so much. I have a question from the audience. Here it goes: **Imagine that you had 30 seconds in front of Ms. Mackenzie Scott to explain the value of PLTL and to ask how the financial underpinnings to support this mode of learning might be developed, what would you say?**

YiMing Yu

So that made me think about this saying, “Teaching people how to fish rather than giving people the fish,” so we have the program teaching people how to fish.

Milka Montes:

That's a really good analogy.

Jim Becvar

I asked the question. Programs come and go and some of them disappear entirely because there is just no sustaining financial underpinning for this marvelous mode of learning to teach young people how to become leaders in such an effective way as they are helping others learn. So, my question is that programs do not survive because academic institutions do not have the kind of financial support. It's not much - it's a very small fraction of what an academic institution spends in a given year - to continue these programs that are of enormous value to the development of leadership at the institution.

Chinedu Chukuigwe

The value is clear. A lot of students are learning, not just to understand the material that they're getting introduced to, but also to be leaders. And you need leaders to run the world once the current leaders have retired or moved on.

On the financial side it is my strong belief that the organization needs to act more like a startup or like a non-profit, that is a sort of a startup. I'm not sure how to put it but in terms of developing financial sustainability, which I think is what you're asking, this needs to be a business and act like a business and even though it's a non-profit, it can act like a business in my mind so it could be how do you sustain yourself? It might be we develop a product, for example, software or it could be software plus content. These are the two strong drivers of where we're going as a society and I just think that the PLTL International Society can tap into that by generating content and probably software to distribute that content or to facilitate people learning at institutions. If there were a software for example that helped people learn

together that might be something that you could sell to universities and sort of mimic PLTL without the institutional organization that goes into it. You use software to actually do that and people don't even understand or even think that there is an organization into it but you already have infused PLTL into that software.

Nicole Vargas

To piggyback off of Chinedu, I know that this is a question that we kind of go around and around every year trying to figure out how PLTL can be more financially sustainable and how the program itself can be more sustainable and what he's saying does make sense. In terms of PLTL needs to be run more like a business, in terms of marketing and in terms of what you're offering to people. At this point in time everybody's looking for things online, there are even websites now that you can sit online and study with people you don't even know. Just sit there, you're sitting there, and the people are watching you on your computer and you're watching them and you're just studying with them. But think of that in terms of what if there was someone that was willing to sit with you and run a PLTL session even if it were hundreds of thousands of miles away in the same fashion that you sit with a random stranger on this study website you could run ideally a Peer Led Team Learning website and they could pay for this service. This is just something that came to me right now as Chinedu was talking. But in terms of financial sustainability I think it would make sense to run it more in that fashion because in education we tend to want things to be given for free, which is why a lot of programs are not sustainable because we want everyone to have access to them but at some point I think it needs to shift to be a little bit more sustainable so that then we can offer it on a more global attainable level.

Madeline Adamczeski

I just want to add one thing and that is at San Jose City College, we did a whole analysis and if you take the number of students benefitting from academic success and improved retention and quantify that in terms of funding, it more than offsets the cost of the Peer Leader's salary, so it is cost effective and it actually generates funding.

Milka Montes

Thank you, Madeline. Wonderful, and Dr. Chao Dong from UTBP added a comment on the chat. He says that Peer Leaders received training at the beginning and some of them creatively have some new things to bring together to improve learning outcomes and engaging students in the workshops. So, he thinks that the PLTL should create a way to inherit this

valuable experience by creating a video or something like that that we could have available for other Peer Leaders. And on that comment I overheard yesterday that FIU has such videos already. And maybe that's another thing that we can do as an organization and become a repository of all of these videos and learning materials that we can put together and perhaps charge for them, for profit like everybody was saying.

Mitsue Nakamura

Let me chime in. You know that everybody has a lot of data about how all the students participate in a workshop. But I have been looking into the effect on Peer Leaders and as you see from these panelists what wonderful leaders for the real world that they became. So, I think to answer some of their questions that Dr. Becvar had, all the university grants that are written, promoting to nurture the future leaders, there's a way besides that of studying the students who participate in the workshops, that is to study the Peer Leaders and the effect on them. That might be another way to get more funding from the university and grants and so forth.

AE Dreyfuss

I appreciate the whole direction that we all have been going in the past two years. It's getting into the second year with the pandemic, all of us being on Zoom and all of us becoming much more aware of software and connecting by video and so on.

One of the real strengths that I don't think we have figured out how to bottle is the actual human contact that face-to-face workshops provide. And so, I appreciate what you're suggesting and as a business model it makes perfect sense, videos and all the technology, but I still don't know how to create that human contact. And yes, synchronous workshops do provide some semblance of that face-to-face workshop idea so that we do have people's expressions and their upper body but there's a lot to be learned from body language and where people sit and how they sit and being able to actually group people in different ways. It's been a serious challenge in the last two years, and I don't know how that can be turned into a profit-making model so to speak. That continues to be a real challenge because you all have benefited from that human connection, and I do completely understand how we all are now thinking about technology, but I don't know what the bridge is.

Madeline Adamczeski

The profit is if you have students that are enrolling in universities, and they reach their goal through PLTL. How we measure that is very sophisticated but if we are able to capture

that, that is the profit in my opinion. As far as the challenges, I think that we learned a lot not only about PLTL but I mean the Peer Leaders taught us a lot. We learned a lot. I think we've overcome most of the challenges associated with technology and I think we can use it as an asset, and I think PLTL becomes even more important during this quarantine, so I think we are profiting. How do we measure that? We're not even measuring that, but I do believe we are and if we can maybe bottle how we overcame those challenges so that we can replicate and make this sustainable, that would be awesome.

Chinedu Chukuigwe

Speaking on what AE mentioned about being in person and how we resolve that. We can take the lessons learned from working in a pandemic and how do you facilitate workshops online and what are the best practices you can take that and put into software. I do believe that over time we're going to go back to in-person meetings; this is going to happen once the pandemic is resolved at some point. And when you go back to that point, software can still enhance in-person meetings, it can still help with scheduling, it can still help with interacting after a workshop. It can still support in-person sessions in many ways. For example, in the healthcare system, a lot of people are using virtual care. But there were still schedules that had to be made if someone had to cancel, all of that was managed through software, if someone had to come into the office. Software. So, I think that we could still have online but we could still think in ways that could still be okay. How does software support physical meetings? Pods for example, where meeting during the pandemic and that was facilitated by software. So, I don't think that these two things are separate, we just have to work towards what is that thing that you can start with that and how that would help move the needle somehow.

Nicole Vargas

I would say that that even might be the bridge that AE was talking about. There really is no substitute for human contact at that point. There's no way that you cannot feel a certain way. When we're looking at each other on the computer it is very different than when you're sitting next to a person. By doing something like this and opening a door, okay I got a little bit out of this, what could I get if this were in person? It might be that segue and say, hey, why can't I do that here at my university? If there are people who are doing this online and who already did it at their universities, why can't I do it? Why can't I get a group of people with a professor and do this and start the program here, for example? So, I would think that this could be seen somewhat as the bridge to get from, okay, we've done it in person, we've adapted to doing it online, how can we adapt it now back to doing it in person somewhere?

Jonathan Tipo

So what AE was talking about and then Dr. Adamczeski was talking about, the whole social aspect. You know by nature, human beings are social beings. We're just created that way. And you can tell a lot by reading the body language and the facial gestures of students in person. If they're frustrated, if they can't understand a question, if they fail to ask a question, or don't know how to ask it because they fear they're going to be belittled or whatever the case may be. I think that's where AE was going to that it's not the same experience as you know online versus being in person. As regards to Dr. Adamczeski, being that it's profitable when your students are staying in their classes, they're passing their classes, they're moving forward to the next upper division class or transferring to the university and then post-grad and then becoming successful in their careers. That's also a measurement of success.

Now in regard to being able to sustain these programs I think as alumni, it's in a way we have a responsibility to give back to these programs. Whether it be working for corporations that make “kudo bank” [e.g., large profits]. Maybe pitching this idea, “So this is what this is where I came from. I am the product of this. I'm working for you now. If I'm some kind of asset to this company,” maybe we could get these companies that we are working for in the future to give back to the community to give back to these programs that obviously instill the tools that these companies are using. Because it's like a ripple effect, PLTL has given us the knowledge and the tools to move forward and we're still using these tools right now in our undergraduate or postgrads or in our careers for companies that we work for or for a school system that we work for. Then why not talk to these companies and pitch the PLTL program idea to them and be like “Hey, let's contribute back to the communities that we came from.”

Leslie Cervantes

I think what could also be done is subscription-based for students where it's not necessarily replacing the in-person workshop but maybe you get your subscription for the semester, that's how you can submit your homework and through that program you can also if there are other people in your workshop or in your class online. Then you can interact with them via video or just through a chat because I think making money or being able to sustain PLTL. Like I said, I don't think there could be a way where you do replace that in-person interaction or that student that comes up to you after the workshop that says, “Hey, like I didn't really understand this,” or “Can you just meet with me 10 minutes, wait for me 10 minutes after, I just want to discuss.” Also, Peer Leaders, at least at UTEP we had office hours.

And it could be like another way you could do online office hours. Sometimes you do have students who do in the beginning feel intimidated to come and talk to you. It serves as a segue and if you do a subscription-based model then the students have to pay for it every semester, it'll expire, and you continue making money that way you can continue to improve the program to kind of tailor it per class or per the needs of the school or the program.

Milka Montes

Those are all really interesting points. Thank you everybody. You already talked about a lot of ideas that we can do to create sustainability for the model. Now, **can you tell us one idea that you think would increase the visibility of the Peer Leaders and Peer Leading across different institutions?**

Melissa Greenlee

I think David kind of touched on this a little bit, taking advantage of all your alumni: the Peer-Led Team Learners. Because who knows one day, I might be a hiring manager at Microsoft and I'm going to be looking at resumes. And I might see someone's resume that says, "I was a PLTL mentor." And comparing that to somebody else with the same resume, Peer Leaders have this kind of leadership experience. Then when you have this group of alumni who are entering into different industries, into government, into academia, all over the place, who have these ties to PLTL, they might be the dean of the school someday and then they have this experience. Oh, I remember the PLTL, I can hopefully fund this in my university. By just driving this alumni network and having this continual communication and connection among all of us to know that this program is still ongoing and still growing and still improving, I think is a good driver for the sustainability of PLTL and making it more noticeable. I mean the "Good Old Boys Club" is always going to be around and so we need to create our own "Good Old Peer Leaders Club" with this Alumni Network. I know in Texas, you walk in with an A&M ring and somebody else has an Aggie ring on too, they're like "Oh yeah, I know you. You know, let's go. You and I are going to work together." And so, I think that would be a very good low barrier to an entry point into creating this visibility for PLTL.

Chinedu Chukuigwe

Maybe a "SWAT" team should be created that starts a startup and takes many of these great ideas or one actually, not many, just maybe brainstorm and come up with that one thing that we could start and implement it fast. Because you also want to keep momentum, in terms of people's motivations, get an MVP out, try to sell it, try to raise money as a startup. There's

so much money out there right now, it's not even funny. People are looking to fund good ideas, they don't even know where to put the money. Trust me. And I believe that there are so many, like we have so many Ph.D.s, doctors, so many very smart, highly-placed people in this group. Not just even because of their knowledge, but just the fact that you have this caliber of people would be interesting to investors. I think if we looked at the organization like that and came up with something and put it in front of investors, not as an academic non-profit: "We want money to do this thing," but as a for-profit enterprise, that could even be a business, a very powerful driver for good.

David Zarate

I have a question for you. So, we all took advantage of this program because it was free. We are successful. We are where we are because we took advantage of this program because it was free, and maybe we did, maybe we didn't have the resources. Say we do make it into a profitable organization or where students have to subscribe for it; more than half the students at local community colleges can barely afford their classes or books. So we're going to leave out students that can't afford to subscribe to a startup business like this? Yes, there are students who get financial aid, there are students that work two, three jobs at a time just to afford to go to college. So, I think that's where the question is: How do we make it profitable without charging students? How do we make it sustainable without charging students? Yes, people that have money are going to be able to afford it. Now do we give students that can't afford some kind of financial aid for it then?

Chinedu Chukuigwe

I don't believe that it was free. First of all, I don't think it was free for you because you paid the tuition and somehow the tuition is what let you have access to PLTL. So, it wasn't free, first of all. Secondly, whether we like it or not, many of these same students who we say don't have money are out there paying for stuff to help them get better grades. There are companies now that are out there, that are not free, and people are paying for it. They make hundreds of millions of dollars, so I think that if it's priced affordably, people will pay for it. You have to think of how you can sustain it.

David Zarate

We had access because we either had financial aid or we were still paying our tuition for course credits or units. That's why we had access to PLTL. We already paid tuition, so is that charge for PLTL going to be included in tuition then?

AE Dreyfuss

We're getting into the weeds and the nitty-gritty. This is indeed the crux of the matter. How do we actually help sustain PLTL in the long run? There are many different financial models and one of the weakest is the grant-funded model. And what happens with all the benefits of PLTL, after the grant runs out? So, some places have solved it one way, some places have solved it in another. And maybe this is the beginning of a conversation of how alumni, alumni who are older than you, another half-generation older who are really well settled in their careers, if we can figure out how to capture at least even 10 percent of that 30,000 figure, let's figure out what kind of financial models might work. It's not that if any one of you is incorrect. This is all part of the discussion. How do we actually figure out how to make it something that is powerful? One of the reasons that is very important is somebody who attended, who is even on this Zoom call right now mentioned she didn't even realize there was a PLTLIS... I don't know how she found out about the conference but there's a huge lack of information or awareness of PLTL and its benefits. So, this is a bigger mission and part of it is just making the whole program across all the campuses much stronger.

Milka Montes

Thank you. I think you hit the nail right on the head there. We really appreciate our panelists. I think that these comments were very important. For example, one of the takeaways is, let's create a network. Let's really do it and we do have such great talent, 10,000 alumni, 400 out of UTEP alone. We can definitely create something. I will be sending you all an invitation to create some kind of PLTL alumni association and feel free to email me with suggestions.

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