**Peer Mentors in Developmental English Classes**

Having peer mentors in three sections during AY 2013-2014 was an invaluable experience, not only for me, but for the students and the student mentors as well. Both peer mentors that were assigned to me during AY 2013-2014 were both former students who had already successfully passed ENG 081, 091, and 101, so they were more than familiar with my class organization and expectations, and because of this, they were able to communicate to their mentees strategies to help them complete the course work successfully.

While the focus of this CATS is on the impact of peer mentors in ENG 091, I felt it necessary to also provide some information regarding the impact in ENG 081. The same peer mentor was assigned to ENG 081 during both Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters. During the Fall semester, she was new to the program so Fall was devoted mostly to training her and providing practice for more responsibilities during the Spring semester. In the Spring 2014 semester, she took more initiative on keeping students on track and also took on more responsibilities by presenting regularly to students on resources and strategies for success. She was also able to complete her three required conferences with each student during Spring 2014; during Fall 2013, only a handful of students completed these assigned conferences. The completion rate is show below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Fall 2013 Cohort**  **N=16** | **Spring 2014 Cohort**  **N=12\*** |
| A (91%-100%) | 3 | 6 |
| B (81%-90%) | 6 | 5 |
| C (71%-80%) | 4 | 1 |
| D (61%-70%) | 1 |  |
| F (<60%) | 2 |  |

\*It should be noted that during Spring 2014, three students dropped because of non-academic factors—one due to family relocation, one due to employment issues, and one due to illness. All three students were passing at the time of withdrawal.

As noted in the abstract, I was fortunate to have a peer mentor assigned to ENG 091 during Spring 2014, and because of that, I was able to do some comparisons in success rates between the peer mentor section and the non-peer-mentor section. As mentioned above, this peer mentor was also a former student in all three of my classes; this experience greatly enhanced his ability to advise and mentor students. He had also been trained by another faculty mentor during Fall 2013, so he came into this class with much more experience and confidence which made a huge impact on students.

The peer mentor section and the non-peer-mentor section were identical classes occurring one right after the other, with the same assignments and expectations. The only difference was that students in the peer mentor section were required to meet three times with their peer mentor during the semester.

Upon examining and comparing grades for both classes, there is not a significant difference with regards to final grades between the two sections, anecdotally, I noticed a distinct difference with regards to class climate. The peer mentor section was livelier and more spirited than the non-peer-mentor section. Students appeared more engaged during class, and seemed to be more willing to work together on in-class activities since they all seemed to know each other better. The non-peer-mentor section, by contrast, though larger was more inhibited and less willing to talk or work with others outside of their table groups when split up. They also did not appear to be as eagerly engaged during in-class activities, though they did complete tasks satisfactorily. I feel strongly that this difference is due in part to the presence of the peer mentor who actively traveled around the room and checked in with each table group during each class session, encouraging students to work together and maintain a positive attitude in class. All students in this section met their peer-mentor conference requirements, and actively sought the peer mentor’s assistance outside of class for information and resources.

With regards to completion, see the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Spring 2014**  **ENG 091 Peer Mentor**  **N=19** | **Spring 2014**  **ENG 091 Regular**  **N=23** |
| A (91%-100%) | 9 | 8 |
| B (81%-90%) | 7 | 8 |
| C (71%-80%) | 2 | 7 |
| D (61%-70%) |  |  |
| F (<60%) | 1 |  |
| Average | 85.9% | 84.9% |

Despite the absence of cold, hard data to prove the effectiveness of the peer mentors in my developmental courses with regards to academic achievement and completion, I can confidently conclude that peer mentors have had a positive impact in terms of fostering a positive and comfortable learning environment where students actively engage with me and with each other.