Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Theoretical and Research-Based Perspectives

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Robert A. Kenedy, *PhD*
Associate Professor,
Department of Sociology
Liberal Arts & Professional Studies
York University, Toronto, Canada
rkenedy@yorku.ca

Dallin Young , *PhD*
Assistant Director, Research, Grants, and Assessment
National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition
University of South Carolina
@DallinYoung

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE:

1. Roles Peer Leaders Play

2. Theoretical Considerations

3. Benefits to Peer Leaders

4. Results from the 2015 Canadian Survey of Peer Leaders

5. Connecting Theory, Research, and Practice

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Roles Peer Leaders Play

Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Theoretical and Research-Based Perspectives

The literature clearly points out that peers are important conduits in terms of:

❑ Transition to college (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002; Crissman Ishler, 2002; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Paul & Brier, 2001; Schlossberg, 1981),

❑ Aid in social and emotional development (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Guon, 1988; Harmon, 2006),

❑ Help promote leadership and career skills development (Astin, 1993; Astin & Kent, Gardner, 2010; 1983; Pascarella, Ethington, & Smart, 1988; Schuh & Laverty, 1983).

Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Theoretical and Research-Based Perspectives

The literature clearly points out that peers:

❑ Promote learning and academic performance (Astin, 1993; Donahue, 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996),

❑ Assist in persistence and retention (Bean, 1985; Braxton, 2002; Potts, Schultz & Foust, 2003-4; Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1993).

❑ Impact satisfaction with college (Astin, 1993; Coffman & Gilligan, 2002),

# Peer Leadership: Theoretical Considerations

Leader Framework of Intersectional Concentric Solidarity

- ❑ This framework explains how peer leadership works

- ❑ The process by which Peer Leaders influence peer learning, development, and integration into university life.

- ❑ The process by which Peer Leaders gain benefits as a result of engaging in these experiences

- ❑ It is a framework or theory to help educational researchers and administrators understand how post-secondary peer leadership works.

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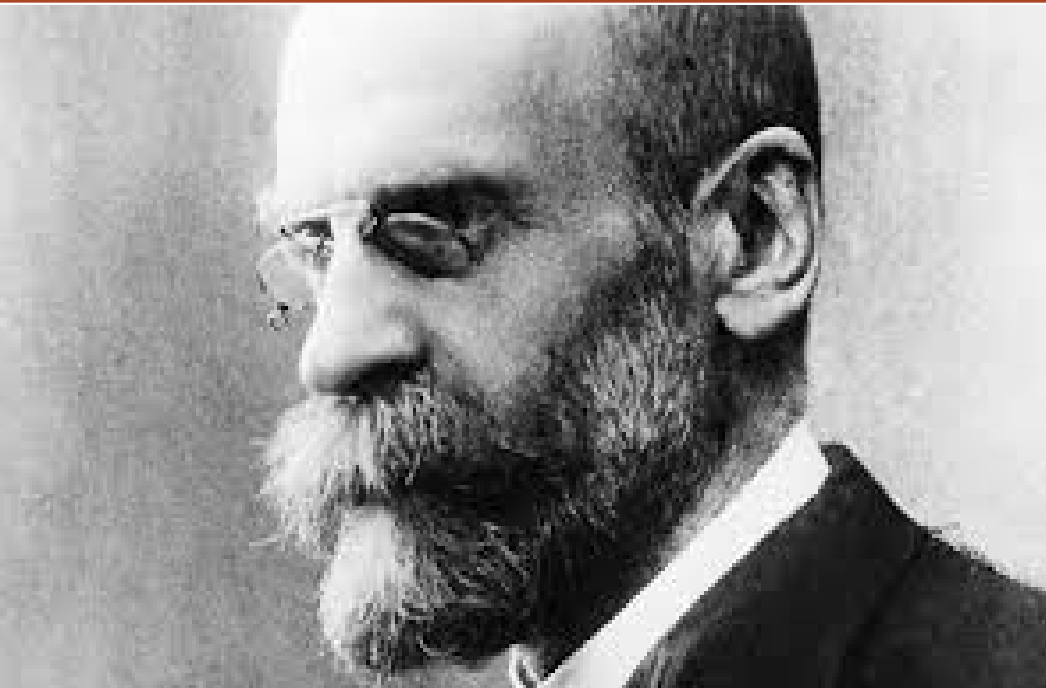
Sociologist Emile Durkheim

Sociologist Peter Blau

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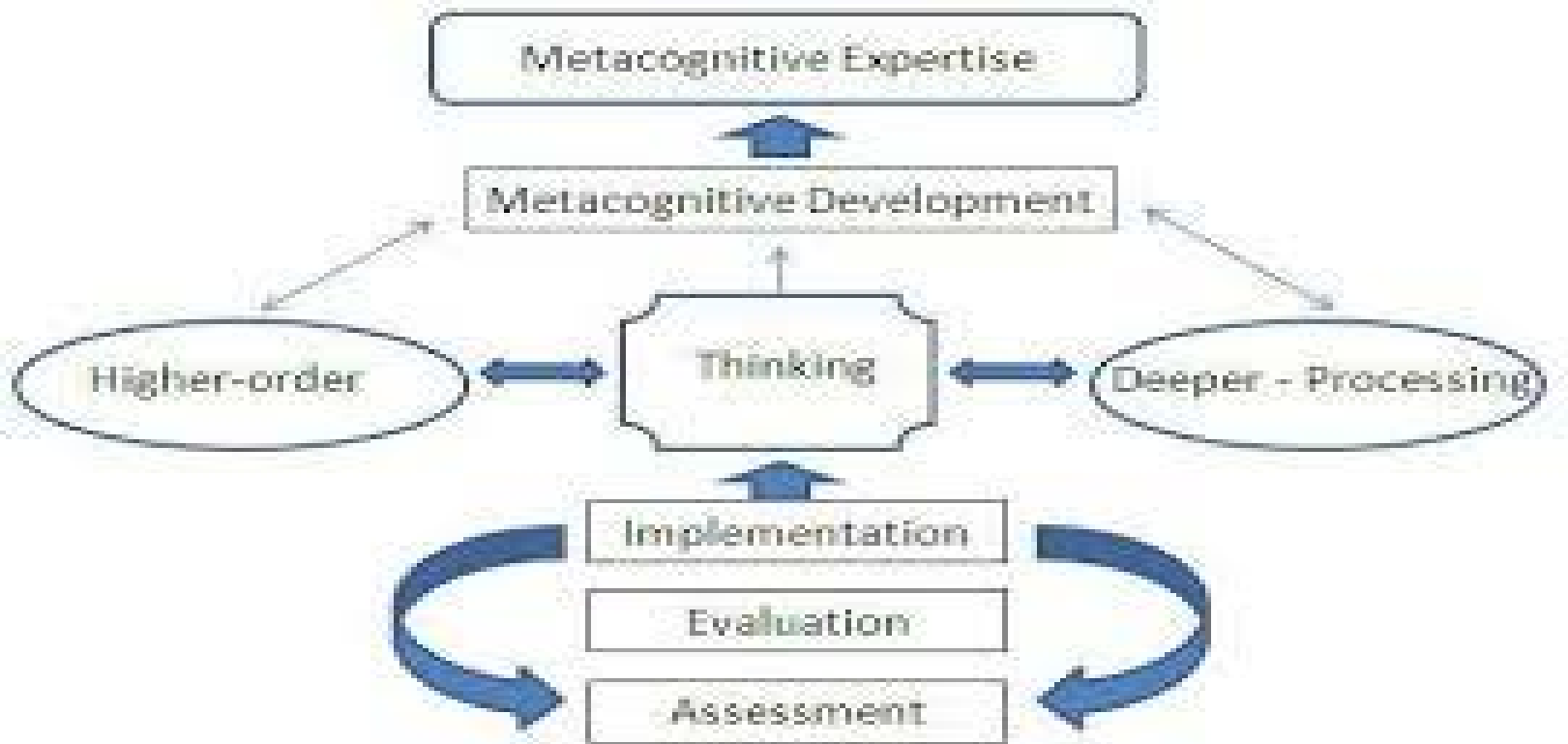
Sociologist
George Simmel

Psychologist
Robert Kegan

Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Theoretical and Research-Based Perspectives

Pang, 2010: 34

What benefits have you seen Peer Leader Experiences provide to the Peer Leaders themselves?

Framework of Intersectional Concentric Solidarity: Benefits for Peer Leaders

❑ Recent research has demonstrated that student involvement through peer leadership yields measurable returns.

❑ For example, peer mentors reported increases in their ability to manage groups, empathize with students, and facilitate learning (Bunting, Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2012; Harmon, 2006; Kenedy, Monty, & Lambert-Drache, 2012).

▪

Framework of Intersectional Concentric Solidarity: Benefits for Peer Leaders

❑ Peer Leaders have demonstrated/reported improvements in:
   ❑ communication and presentation skills;
   ❑ leadership abilities;
   ❑ integrative and applied learning;
   ❑ higher-order thinking skills;
   ❑ knowledge of campus resources;
   ❑ interaction with faculty, staff, and peers;
   ❑ critical thinking;
   ❑ problem solving;
   ❑ ability to work under pressure;
   ❑ and interpersonal skills

(Astin, 1993; Bunting et al., 2012; Newton & Ender, 2010; Russel & Skinkle, 1990; Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012).

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Framework of Intersectional Concentric Solidarity: Benefits for Peer Leaders

❑ Peer leaders have also demonstrated increases in:
  ❑ factual knowledge,
  ❑ helping others,
  ❑ friendships,
  ❑ personal growth,
  ❑ positive regard for instructor skills,
  ❑ personal responsibility, and
  ❑ decision making

  (Bandura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart, & Bartoloemei, 2003; Bunting et al., 2012; Kenedy & Skipper, 2012).

2015 Canadian Survey of Peer Leadership Methodology

- Administered to Canadian Universities between January 2015 and January 2016

- 10 Institutions participated

- Yielded 482 useful responses (students indicated having participated in at least one peer leadership experience during their university or college experience)

- Online questionnaire asking students to report structural characteristics of peer leadership experiences and to self report increases in key outcome areas

2015 Canadian Survey of Peer Leadership Participating Institutions

Cape Breton University
Mount Saint Vincent University
Thompson Rivers University
University of Guelph
University of Ottawa
University of the Fraser Valley
University of Toronto – Mississauga
University of Toronto – Scarborough
University of Toronto – St. George
York University

Types of Peer Leader Experiences: Most Commonly Reported (n = 419)

Peer Leader Experience	Freq.	%
Academic: Peer mentor	205	48.9
Student clubs, societies or social organisations	157	37.5
Campus activities	140	33.4
Orientation (e.g., new student, extended, or summer orientation)	128	30.5
First-year experience	108	25.8
Academic: Peer tutor	98	23.4
Community service or service-learning	71	16.9
Future/Prospective students ambassador	64	15.3
Academic: Other (e.g., teaching assistant, lab assistant)	63	15.0
Academic: Peer advisor	56	13.4

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Types of Peer Leader Experiences:
Least Commonly Reported (n = 419)

Peer Leader Experience	Freq.	%
Housing and Residential Life	54	12.9
Student government	53	12.6
Academic: Peer educator	47	11.2
Student wellness or wellbeing	45	10.7
High School Outreach	44	10.5
International student office	30	7.2
Other (please specify)	29	6.9
Multicultural affairs	27	6.4
Intramural athletics	26	6.2
Counseling or mental health	22	5.3
Study abroad or exchange	21	5.0
Club Sports	18	4.3
Outdoor or recreational sports	16	3.8
Religious	14	3.3
Inter-university sports	13	3.1
Student productions or media	13	3.1
Physical health	11	2.6
Judicial affairs or student conduct	6	1.4
Greek life (i.e., social fraternity or sorority)	6	1.4
Financial literacy	2	0.5

Types of Peer Leader Experiences:
Experience with longest service (n = 419)

Peer Leader Experience	Freq.	%
Academic: Peer mentor	124	29.6
Student clubs, societies or social organisations	51	12.2
Academic: Peer tutor	47	11.2
Academic: Other (e.g., teaching assistant, lab assistant) (please specify)	24	5.7
Housing and Residential Life	24	5.7
Student government	21	5.0
Other (please specify)	17	4.1
Academic: Peer educator	14	3.3
Orientation (e.g., new student, extended, or summer orientation)	13	3.1
Campus activities	12	2.9

Types of Peer Leader Experiences: Experience with longest service (n = 419)

How long have you served in this position? (n = 419)

Chart — Percentage of Respondents vs. Length of Time Served:

- Less than one term: 9.8
- 1 term: 13.8
- 2 terms: 30.3
- 3 - 4 terms: 32.7
- 5 - 6 terms: 10.0
- 7 terms or longer: 3.3

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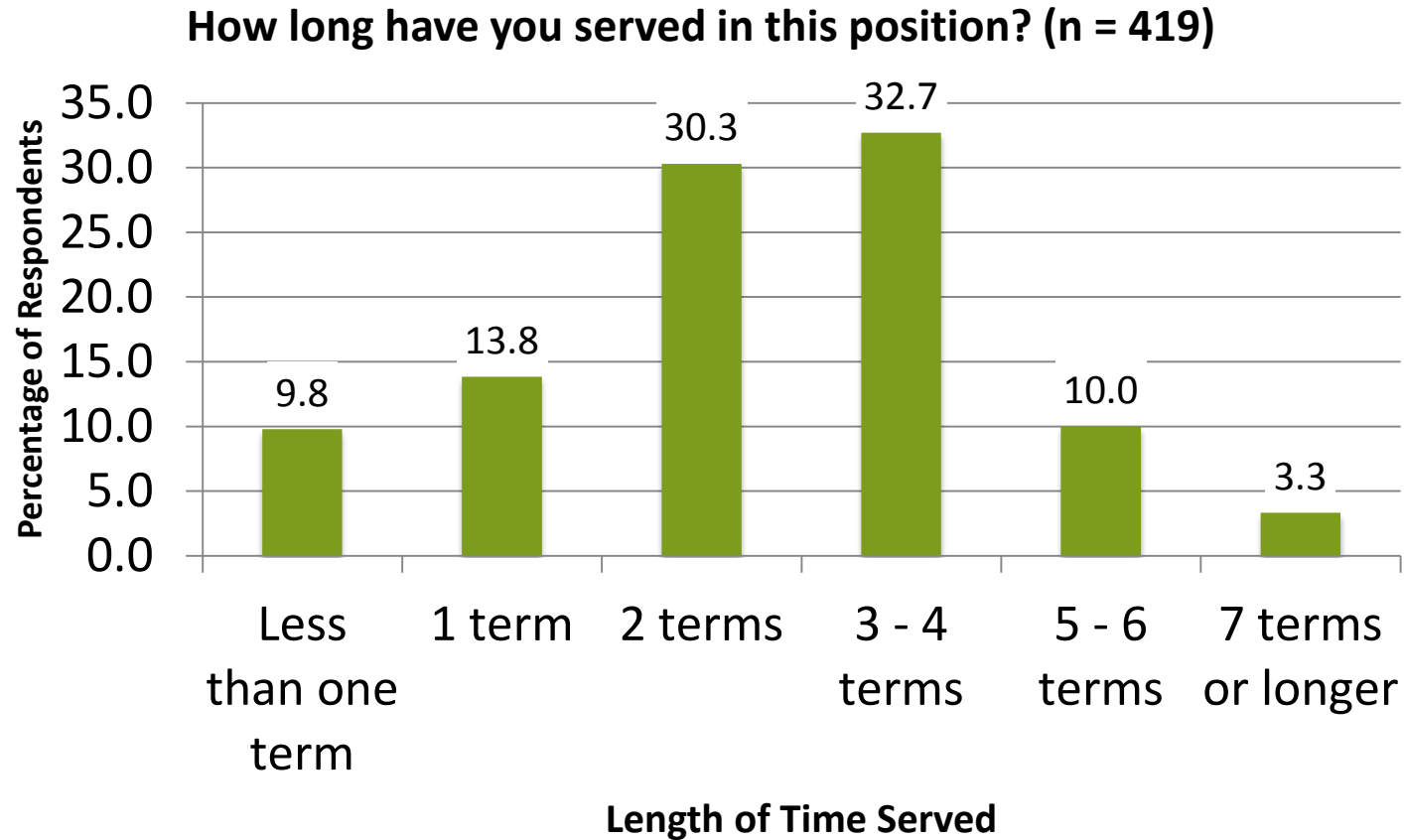**Canadian Network** for the first year experience and student transition

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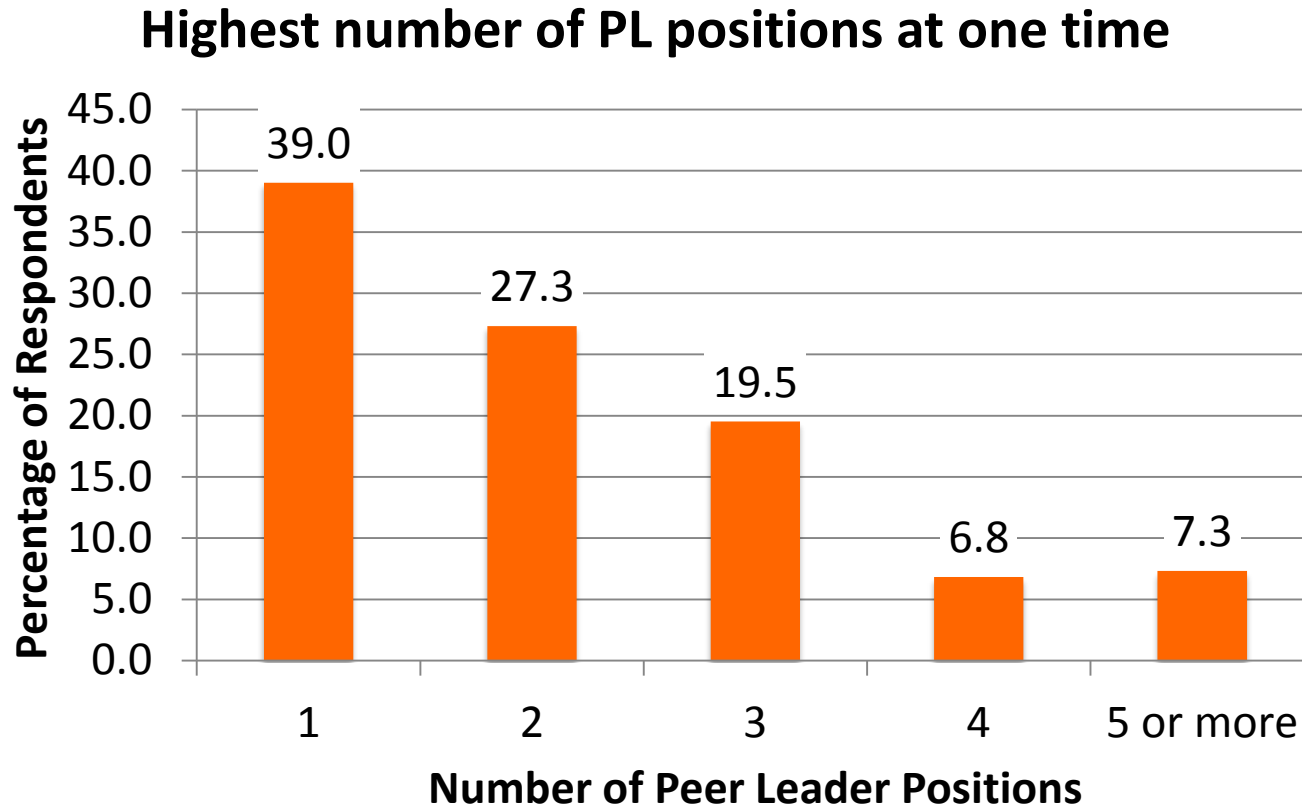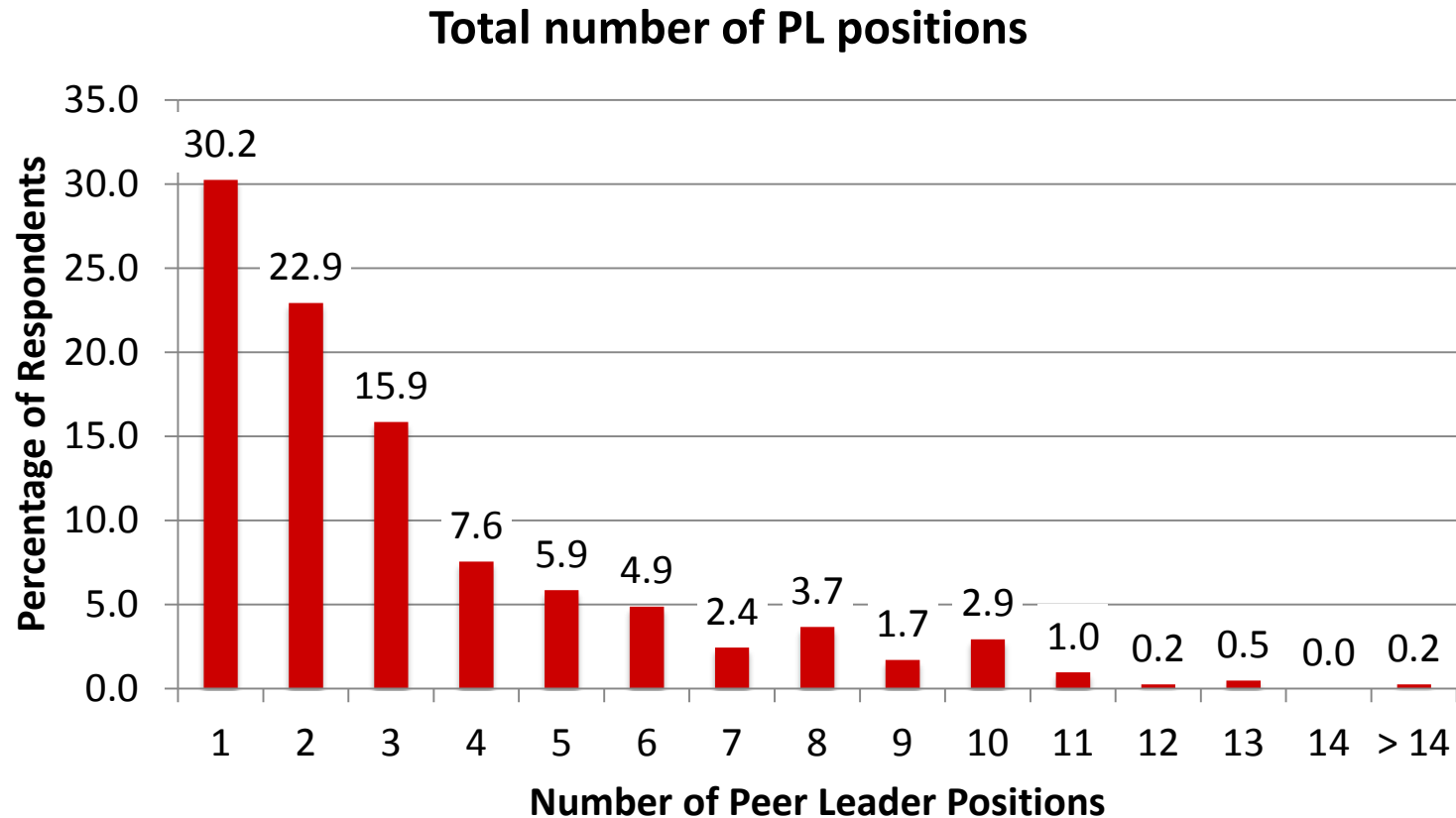
Evidence of Engagement:
Highest number of PL positions at one time (n = 410)

Highest number of PL positions at one time

Evidence of Engagement:
Total number of PL positions (n = 410)

Total number of PL positions

Chart data — *Percentage of Respondents* (y-axis) vs *Number of Peer Leader Positions* (x-axis):

Number of Peer Leader Positions	Percentage of Respondents
1	30.2
2	22.9
3	15.9
4	7.6
5	5.9
6	4.9
7	2.4
8	3.7
9	1.7
10	2.9
11	1.0
12	0.2
13	0.5
14	0.0
> 14	0.2

Evidence of Engagement:
Hours spent per week on Peer Leader Responsibilities (n = 410)
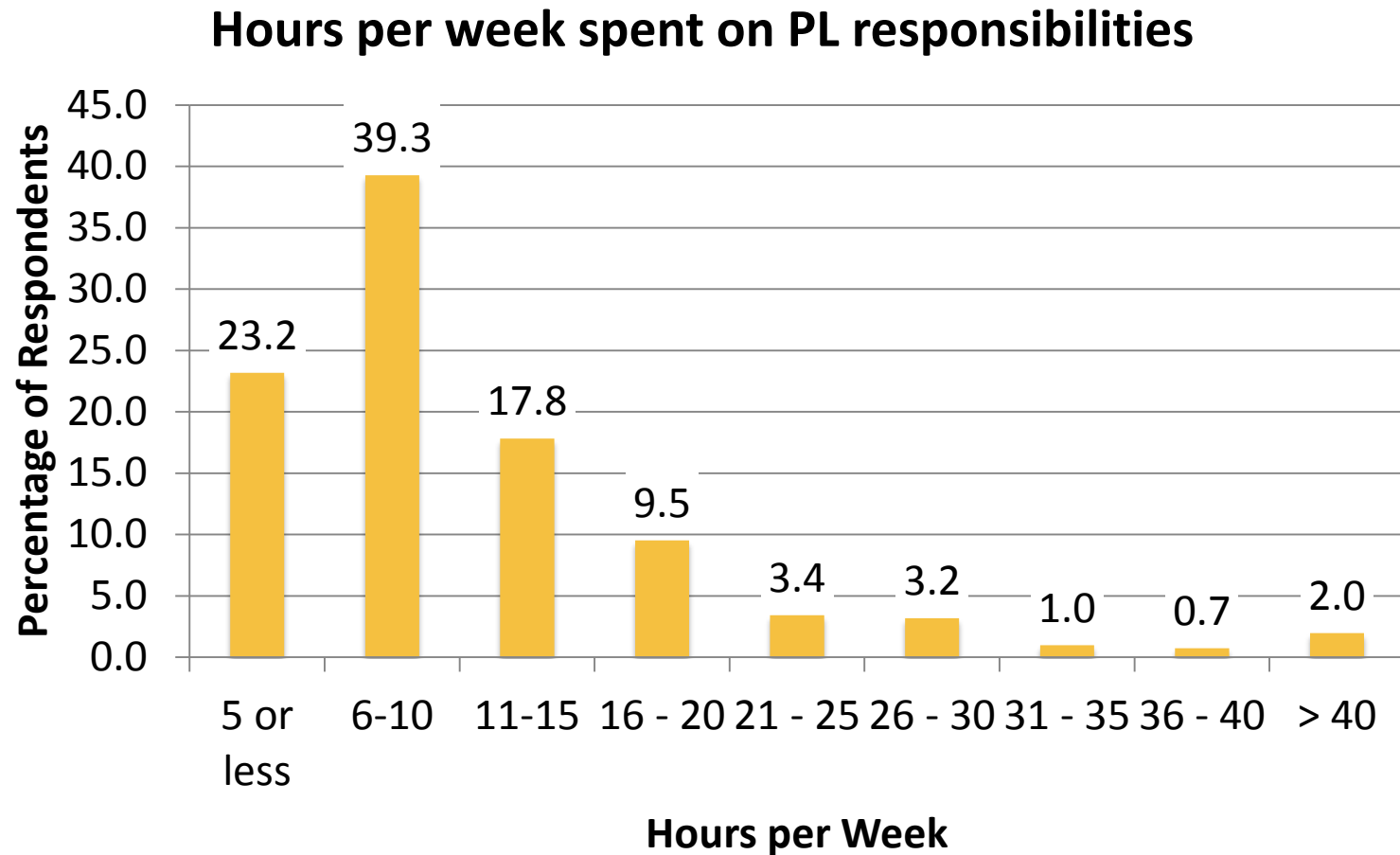
Hours per week spent on PL responsibilities

Investment of Time and Energy – Benefits and Balance

Evidence of Engagement

- 2/3 of all peer leaders have held 1-2 PL positions at one time

- 7 in 10 peer leaders have held 1-3 total PL positions

- More than 60% of all peer leaders spend 10 hours or less per week on PL duties

Over-Engagement?

- 1 in 10 have held 8 or more PL positions

- 10% reported spending 20 hours or more per week.

- Slightly less than 4% spend 30 or more hours per week.

"I don't know if its related, but since I've started working as a Residence Life Staff, my average grades have increased by up to 10% depending on the course. Now this might just be a coincidence, and I've just enrolled in courses I find more interesting this semester. But my theory is that because I spend so much time working as a leader, it forces me to manage my time best and procrastinate less (i.e. "I'm planning to do leadership stuff later, therefore I NEED to get this done know while I still have time!")"

"Being a peer leader has definitely pushes me to be more focused and time-effective when working on a task. It has shown me that there are various ways in which academics can be tackled, as well as the numerous resources available at my fingertips (should I need them). Overall, it's been more beneficial than harmful"

"I tend to get involved in too many extra-curricular activities and peer leadership experiences, on top of school. Although it has affected my academic performance in the sense that I spend less time doing school work, it is a choice that I make because I feel more compelled to engage in these leadership experiences than my studies. I value my leadership experiences because I have learned so much through them that I would not have necessarily learned in a classroom."

High Expectations - Training

Communicating Expectations through Training

- 92% of peer leaders received some training for their peer leader positions

- 4.5 in 10 reported training for one or more PL experience lasted one week or longer

Expectations Unclear – Little or no Training

- 7.5% of peer leaders did not receive formal training for their positions

- 73% reported training for one or more PL experience was 2 days or shorter
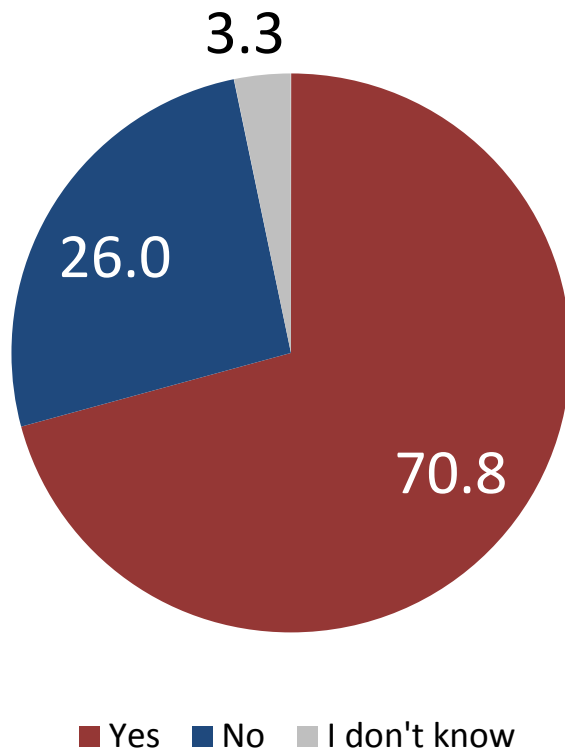
High Expectations - Training

"Being a peer leader has affected how I interpret information from lectures. Having been trained on creating lesson plans and how to organize structures I am more able to recognize how professors structure their lectures and what I should attend my focus on."
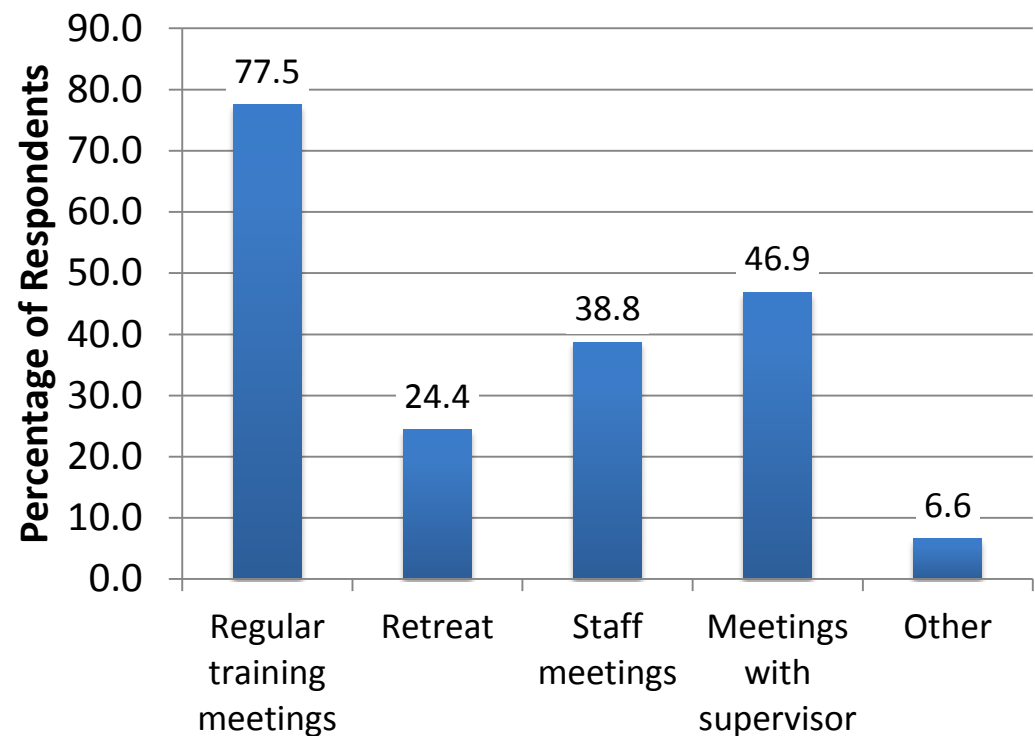
Reflection and Integrated Learning/ Frequent Feedback

Did you receive any additional ongoing formal training after the initial training? (n = 366)

Pie chart:
- 70.8 (Yes)
- 26.0 (No)
- 3.3 (I don't know)

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know

What type of additional ongoing formal training did you receive? (n = 258)

Bar chart — Percentage of Respondents:
- Regular training meetings: 77.5
- Retreat: 24.4
- Staff meetings: 38.8
- Meetings with supervisor: 46.9
- Other: 6.6

Based on the information just shown, what do we learn about how we can better improve structures of Peer Leadership Experiences?

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Outcomes of Peer Leader Experiences

Over 80%

of Peer Leaders reported increased:
- Knowledge of
- Understanding of
- Interaction with
people from backgrounds different from their own

Exposure to Diverse Perspectives

"Being a peer leader has connected me with my peers, my faculty, and, in general, my school. In an ever more disconnected world, being a peer leader has helped me create lasting relationships with many people that I will know and appreciate for years to come".

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Over 80%

of Peer Leaders reported **increased** skills in:

- Adaptability
- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Interpersonal Communication
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Project management
- Organization
- Time management
- Critical thinking

Real-World Application

Over **80%**

of Peer Leaders reported **increased** employability outcomes:

- Building professional relationships
- Applying knowledge to a real-world setting
- Bringing together information
- Analyzing a problem from new perspectives
- Creating innovative approaches
- Providing direction

Real-World Application

What does this all mean?

❑ Data from Canadian Survey of Peer Leaders

❑ Theoretical framework

 ❑ Social Web – Concentric Circles - Simmel

 ❑ Community – Durkheim & Blau

 ❑ Cross-cultural thinking – Kegan

❑ How does this understanding extend the theory?

Connecting Theory to Research to Practice

How can we structure Peer Leadership experiences that facilitate the underlying factors that lead to improvement in Peer Leader development?

❑ Selection
  ❑ Early opportunity to set the stage for experience
  ❑ Consider who is and who is not receiving opportunity for experience
❑ Training
  ❑ Emphasize the expectations that the peer leadership experience is more than just a transactional experience
  ❑ Provide training on skills and competencies with an eye beyond accomplishing tasks at hand

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How can we structure Peer Leadership experiences that facilitate the underlying factors that lead to improvement in Peer Leader development?

- ❑ Supervision
  - ❑ Opportunities to reflect (developing and reinforcing metacognition)
  - ❑ Feedback
  - ❑ Ask yourself: "How can I create experiences for this PL to help set up future opportunities?"

- ❑ Assessment and evaluation
  - ❑ Include measures of success of "job tasks"
  - ❑ Also include measures of broader skill development