

Public Abstract

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Title:RESIDENT ASSISTANT PEER TRAINING: PERCEPTIONS SURROUNDING THE USE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPERIENCED STUDENT LEADERS AS TRAINERS AT ONE SMALL PRIVATE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

This qualitative case study of one small private Catholic university in the northeast examines the perceptions of experienced (i.e. second to third year staff) and inexperienced (i.e. newly hired staff) student resident assistants. Specifically, this study focuses on the observations and insights of experienced and inexperienced staff as it relates to peer presented training and the overall training curriculum.

The use of experienced student staff to train inexperienced student staff is a model utilized by various universities but there are data to determine how common this model is, nor has there been any research related to the student staff perceptions of the effectiveness of such a model.

Examination and coding of participant responses determined training sessions presented by experienced student staff were perceived to be a successful teaching medium. Experienced student staff were seen as knowledgeable, able to convey their knowledge effectively, and potentially more approachable than professional staff. These findings are similar to research regarding academic near peer educators. The significance of this research comes from the alignment of this study's findings with near peer model. Further, this study marks the first time this model has been utilized in student affairs research.

This research highlights the importance of the roles of experienced student staff as teachers, mentors, and supervisors. Participants believed the first two roles were appropriate for experienced staff to fulfill but expressed strong opposition to the use of experienced staff as supervisors. Study participants stated they believed the use of peer to peer training should be expanded and include greater roles for SRAs in planning the training curriculum as well as the addition of more peer to peer presented programs. This was an important finding, but it could simply mean student leaders enjoyed being taught by other students. Another interesting observation was the impact of experience. The years of positional experience appeared to impact participants' perception of trainers. This impact was particularly notable in interactions with supervisors. Recommendations for practice include a revision of the training curriculum to be inclusive of student participation during planning, topic selection, and eventual execution.