AN EXPLORATION OF PROCESSES AND METHODS TO DESIGN AND ASSESS LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR PEER EDUCATORS

by

BRAD VANN HARMON

(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand the specific process through which peer education program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and to discover how the information gathered through this process is used to evaluate peer educator performance, determine whether or not the designated learning outcomes have been achieved, and improve the peer education experience for the peer educators. Research questions were constructed to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of program coordinators and to examine the intentionality behind the development and assessment of learning outcomes as well as how the information gained from this process was used to improve the experience for peer educators. Of specific concern were the types of learning outcomes developed for peer educators and how these outcomes were used to gauge the overall performance of the peer educators. Special attention also was given to the types of learning outcomes tied to peer educator training and how the information gained from their assessment was used.

Interviews with 11 program coordinators who direct peer education programs for first-year college students at colleges and universities in the United States reveal that the development
and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators is not an intentional process. Program coordinators can easily articulate their expectations for peer educator learning and development and have expectations that peer educators will achieve increased competency in professional skill areas, particularly in areas of interpersonal communication and leadership. However, program coordinators have not intentionally developed learning outcomes with consideration as to how to measure their achievement. Program coordinators rely heavily on anecdotal evidence and self-reflective assessment tools and have not considered how to formally measure outcomes in a manner which would provide substantive evidence that learning and development has occurred. They provide little evidence of learning outcomes tied to peer educator training and have not considered how to formally evaluate the impact training has on peer educator learning and development. The information gained from self-reflective assessment tools is used to improve peer educator training as well as make the experience more developmentally beneficial for the peer educators.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Charles and Sharon Harmon, who have provided me with more love, support, and encouragement than any son could ask. To my mother, who from an early age modeled to me the type of educator of which we need more in our school systems and in our classrooms. She truly has been an inspiration to me for passion, dedication to excellence, and being an advocate for the needs and interests of students inside and outside of the classroom environment. To my father, who has taught me a great deal about working in higher education and who has provided the encouragement and motivation for me to constantly excel. I only hope that I can be as good a man and professional as he has been throughout his career. If I am only as half as respected in my field as he is in his, then I will consider it a marvelous accomplishment. Thanks to both of you for always providing the many resources which have encouraged my learning and growth from the time I was a small child. You have never stopped believing in my potential, even when I make mistakes, and I greatly appreciate and admire you for the job you have done as my parents.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions within the United States feature a wide variety of peer educator roles intentionally designated for first-year students. Although other peer educator roles designed to offer support to students beyond the first year of college exist, peer educator roles for first-year students are designed specifically to provide a service to the institution while facilitating growth and change among first-year students and helping them successfully transition to college. The term “peer educator” has often served as a comprehensive descriptor for describing the various roles in which students provided leadership, support, and guidance to fellow students, particularly in settings which ease this transition (Ender & Newton, 2000). The power of positive peer relationships has long been proven to have a significant impact on whether or not students are connected to the institution and successfully persist to graduation (Astin, 1996; Bean, 1985; Grant-Valone & Ensher, 2000; Tinto, 1975). Belief in the power of peer educators to facilitate personal growth and change among fellow students has resulted in their increasing usage over time (Winston & Ender, 1988). This is largely due to the belief that students are more likely to relate to their fellow peers than professionals and, as a result, have a greater potential for being influenced in order to facilitate behavioral change (Klein, Sondag, & Drolet, 1994; Sloane & Zimmer, 1993). Students report preferring peer educators at least one to three years older than the student over administrators, faculty, and fellow students of the same age (Rice & Brown, 1990), a discovery which suggests that students desire peer influence from someone who is slightly older and a little more experienced but still within the age range of their
peer group. As a result, a wide variety of peer educator roles, such as orientation leaders, peer advisors, peer mentors, and peer health educators, have been designed to assist new students achieve successful connections to the academic and social life at the institution.

Statement of the Problem

Participation in peer education programs is not only beneficial for the students on which the program is focused but is also extremely rewarding for the students serving as peer educators (Fabiano, 1994; Klein, Sondag, & Drolet, 1994). A significant amount of research indicates that students who serve as peer educators experience tremendous growth and development as a result of their participation in these types of roles (Badura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart, & Bartoloemi, 2003; Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000; Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Holland & Huba, 1989; Jones & Kolko, 2002; McKinney & Reynolds, 2002; Micari, Streitwieser, & Light, 2006; Rice & Brown, 1990; Sawyer, Pinciaro, & Bedwell, 1997). Peer educators also may experience a significant amount of learning if they are provided with opportunities to engage and observe each other’s mentoring behaviors (Benjamin, 2001). Recent research has established that students in peer educator roles learn through collaborative and self-reflective processes (Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2005; Dye & Robinson, 2005; Harmon, 2006; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2004). Peer educators not only experience personal and professional development through service in these types of positions but also proceed through a unique learning process where they integrate what they learn and determine practical applications for their career development (Harmon; Micari, Streitwieser, & Light; Puchkoff & Font-Padron, 1990; Tenny & Houck, 2004; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier). It is vitally important to focus on evaluating not only the effectiveness of peer educators but the way in which they are changed by their experiences (Fabiano, 1994). However, even though some emphasis has been placed on research regarding
the recognition that peer educators are significantly affected by and learn from their experiences, very little attention has been given to the process peer education program coordinators use to develop learning outcomes and assess the learning and development which occurs as a result of this type of service.

Specifying learning outcomes allows professionals working in colleges and universities to measure the degree of student knowledge and the specific competencies gained from participation in a particular program (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004). The establishment of outcomes offers a direction for designing and modifying programs and services while offering suggestions to students about the intentions professionals have for what they are to learn (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Successful peer educators must acquire specific knowledge, skills, and personal qualities in areas such as intercultural competence, interpersonal communication skills, and problem solving; develop an understanding of group process; know how to successfully lead a group; recognize strategies of success for students; appropriately use campus resources and referral techniques; and understand and practice personal ethics and standards (Ender & Newton, 2000). Researchers have called for more comprehensive and continuous means of assessing the personal and academic gains experienced by students participating in peer education programs (McKinney & Reynolds, 2002) and have suggested studies that identify the specific peer education aspects and types of interactions which are productive and lead to learning (Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2005; Dye & Robinson, 2005). As a result, it is extremely important that the peer education experience be documented and analyzed with particular attention given to the knowledge gained by peer educators, not just the students whom they serve (Sawyer, Pinciaro, & Bedwell, 1997; Tenney & Houck, 2004). It has also been suggested that there is a need for more comprehensive research on the efficacy and
outcomes of the peer education experience on peer educators involving data obtained from multiple institutions (Badura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart, & Bartoloemi, 2003).

Several researchers have called for a more intentional focus on identifying and measuring the specific knowledge and skills related to the training of peer educators as well as determining how they are affected by it (Lindsey, 1997; Russel & Skinkle, 1990). Badura, Millard, Peluso, and Ortman (2000) have recommended the development of “well-designed outcome assessments of peer-provided programs” (p. 477). Recent research on learning outcomes associated with peer education (Bentley, Cradit, & Jackson, 2006) has also provided a context for this type of outcome development:

For institutions in the process of developing or redesigning undergraduate peer mentor programs, the data suggests that consideration must be made in how learning outcomes are designed and instructional strategies employed to facilitate optimal learning among males and females. This consideration likely permeates how a program is represented in various mediums – online, written brochures, course learning objectives and faculty-mentor partnering considerations…When undergraduate peer mentoring programs may be designed to support or even reflect institutional priorities, there is a compelling need to foster significant learning outcomes for all students. (p. 6)

Despite recommendations for research on the development and assessment of learning outcomes associated with peer education, the question remained as to the process peer education program coordinators use to effectively design substantive learning outcomes that examine the nature of what peer educators are expected to learn from their experiences and the types of learning outcomes which result. It was also important that consideration be given to whether or not this process of developing and assessing learning outcomes is an intentional process or one
that has resulted unintentionally. Additional concerns which had to be addressed were the manner in which this process is used in the development of learning outcomes for peer educator training, as well as how the results of the assessment of these outcomes are used to gauge the impact on overall peer educator performance throughout their term of service. Little information existed on the specific methods peer education program coordinators use to measure the performance of peer educators and to determine whether or not the peer educators have achieved the desired learning outcomes as a result of their participation. Finally, more specific information was required in order to understand how the information gained from the assessment of learning outcomes is used to improve the peer education experience for the peer educators. The purpose of this study was to understand the specific process through which peer education program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and to discover how the information gathered through this process is used to evaluate peer educator performance, determine whether or not the designated learning outcomes have been achieved, and improve the peer education experience for the peer educators.

Special Note: From this point forward in the study, the term “program coordinators” will be understood to refer to peer education program coordinators.

Research Assumptions

This research study was based on several assumptions which resulted from the researcher’s own professional experience coordinating peer education programs and interacting with peer educators. Research questions for this study were designed to address each of these assumptions. The researcher operated with the basic assumptions that a) program coordinators are potentially more concerned with the development and assessment of learning outcomes for students for whom a particular peer educator program has been designed and have not
intentionally engaged in a process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for the peer educators serving in these programs; b) any development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators which exists has been due to unintentional efforts by program coordinators; c) because peer education program coordinators have not intentionally engaged in this process, specific learning outcomes for peer education programs either do not exist or are not clearly identified and articulated; d) if learning outcomes do exist for peer educators in some form, they are not being sufficiently assessed and measured as to determine what the students serving as peer educators are learning from their experiences and whether or not the learning outcomes are being achieved; and e) if learning outcomes are being examined and at least minimally measured, program coordinators are doing little to use them to improve the experience for the peer educators.

Research Questions

The research questions (RQ) examined by this study were:

RQ1: Do program coordinators intentionally design and assess learning outcomes for peer educators?

RQ2: What types of learning outcomes are developed by program coordinators for peer educator training and how are the results from the assessment of these outcomes used to gauge peer educator performance throughout their term of service?

RQ3: What types of overall programmatic learning outcomes are developed by program coordinators for students who serve as peer educators?

RQ4: What specific methods are used by program coordinators to assess and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and determine whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved?
RQ5: How is the information gained from the assessment and measurement of learning outcomes for peer educators used by program coordinators in order to improve the peer education experience for peer educators?

Limitations and Biases

This research study had several limitations to which attention must be given. The use of a qualitative approach to understand and describe the processes and methods used by program coordinators to assess learning outcomes for students serving as peer educators involved the purposeful, and non-random, selection of a sample that will not be generalizable in a statistical sense. While the population chosen for this study was not convenient, it also was not a random sample. The initial e-mail soliciting participation in the study was sent via the national First-Year Experience Listserv and the national First-Year Assessment Listserv, both of which are operated by the University of South Carolina’s National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. This university, and particularly its National Resource Center, has historically been viewed as providing the national foundation and focus for research of all trends and issues related to the first year of college and also serves as a national benchmark for successful institutional efforts supporting and enhancing the first year of college. As a result of the significant historical and national influence of this center, program coordinators may have chosen to participate in this study when they may have otherwise not chosen to do so. After an initial e-mail failed to yield enough participants for the study, the researcher made the decision to send an additional e-mail to both of these listservs inviting participation in the study. The researcher also decided to send an e-mail soliciting participation in the study to the national Peer Advising Discussion Listserv, which is operated by the National Academic Advising Association. Given the professional significance of this organization within the field of academic
advising, program coordinators may have chosen to participate in this study when they may have
otherwise not chosen to do so.

The researcher intentionally decided to include in this study only program coordinators
who direct peer education programs that provide guidance and support to first-year students,
which may adversely affect whether or not the findings of this study can be generalized to peer
education programs which provide support to students beyond the first year of college. The
residence life field features numerous examples of peer educators, the most recognized being that
of the Resident Assistant. Residence life programs generally provide structured training
programs which feature assessment approaches concerned with whether or not residence life peer
educators experience learning and achieve competencies in the various areas which training
addresses in order to determine overall program effectiveness. However, this research study was
primarily focused on examining the development and assessment of learning outcomes for
individual peer educators rather than the assessment of learning outcomes from a programmatic
standpoint. As a result, the diversity provided by residence life programs provided complexity
that the researcher did not address within the context of this study, and the researcher made an
intentional decision to exclude program coordinators based within a residence life setting from
this study. This decision may adversely affect whether or not study findings can be generalized
to programs found within residence life settings. The researcher also served as the primary
instrument for data collection and analysis during the study, and as a result, may present some
personal biases that must also be addressed.

The Researcher

To improve the reliability of this research study, it is vitally important that I acknowledge
that I approached this topic with certain biases, in addition to the assumptions listed previously,
which shaped the lens through which I examined this topic. During the course of this study, I served as the advisor to a peer judicial review board and worked extensively with students serving as peer educators. Prior to beginning my Ph.D. program, I also served as the director of a peer mentor program for four years at one institution and as a graduate assistant coordinator for a program at another institution. My interactions and conversations with program coordinators in a variety of settings over the course of my professional career led me to question whether or not intentional processes actually exist for the development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators. My professional goals and expectations throughout my experience of directing peer education programs were to intentionally provide opportunities for peer educators to learn and grow developmentally from their experiences in the programs I supervised. It was important to acknowledge that while I was conducting this study, I was also involved in the development of an assessment process tied to developmental growth and learning for the peer educators who served on the peer judicial board I advised. In addition, I previously conducted research on the learning processes and outcomes associated with students who served as peer mentors (Harmon, 2006), the findings of which have convinced me that program coordinators must do more to intentionally address the developmental and learning needs of those students serving as peer educators and make the peer education experience more beneficial for them. I recognized each of these biases and carefully monitored and checked them throughout the entire research process.

Operational Definitions

The following definitions provided context for this research study.

Peer Educator

Defining the specific context of what is meant by the terms “peer education” and “peer educator” has not been easy. Ender (1984) stated that lack of a single term or definition which
cuts across various program roles and environments has limited research and training for peer educators, a fact emphasized by Benjamin (2001) nearly 20 years later: “Peer roles, such as peer tutor, peer counselor, peer assistant, peer educator, and peer mentor, often have different contextual connotations; thus, there is little literature that addresses these individual roles in any great depth” (p.3). Gould and Lomax (1993) explained that while the educational instruction involved in peer education may take many forms, such as resident assistants, peer advisors, and peer health educators, the specific role involved in peer education features a special relationship of guidance and support among equals where peer educators assist the students with whom they are working. Ender (1984) suggested that peer educators fulfill the role of assessing a student’s problem, determining an appropriate level of intervention, and knowing when and where to make necessary referrals. In addition, Sloane and Zimmer (1993) provided a further context for the specific functions peer educators provide to fellow students, arguing, “By helping to get the facts straight, by role modeling appropriate behavior, and by suggesting how to solve problems, peer educators help their fellow student examine and change their behaviors in a safe environment” (p. 244).

Ender and Newton (2000) indicate the term “peer educator” has been used traditionally as a comprehensive descriptor to represent any role (i.e. peer leader, peer mentor, orientation assistant, resident assistant) where students provide leadership, guidance, and support to fellow students. Peer educators, often used interchangeably with the term “paraprofessional,” are described as:

…students who have been selected and trained to offer educational services to their peers. These services are intentionally designed to assist in the adjustment, satisfaction, and persistence of students toward attainment of their educational goals. Students performing
in [peer educator] roles are compensated for their services and supervised by qualified professionals. (Ender, 1983, p. 324)

Winston and Ender (1988) further clarified this definition, excluding student workers who simply perform administrative tasks, by focusing predominantly on using peer educators for the purposes of intentionally assisting with the adjustment, satisfaction, and persistence of college students. For the purposes of this study, the term “peer educator” described undergraduate students who provide guidance and support to fellow students in order to assist with their transition to and success at a college or university. The term “peer education program coordinators” described those individuals whom were directly responsible for the administration of a peer educator program which specifically offered support to first-year college students. This study did not examine the various peer education programs that provide this function beyond the first year of college.

*Learning Outcomes*

Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004) defined learning outcomes as the end results of a program which express the knowledge and the specific competencies students gain as a result of their participation. They argued that these types of outcomes are typically detailed statements, often based on predetermined goals and objectives or appropriate national standards when applicable, which state the knowledge and competencies it is anticipated that students will achieve from the program or initiative. Learning outcomes “typically use active verbs such as demonstrate, articulate, illustrate, conduct, define, describe, apply, compose, integrate, convince, create, plan, compare, and summarize” (Bresciani, 2003, p. 1) and must be measurable in the sense that a person must be able to identify or observe how they know that students are able to exemplify the expected knowledge or skills which should result from participation in a particular
program or initiative (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson). This definition was used for the purposes of this study.

Significance

A significant amount of research indicated that peer educators were affected developmentally by their experience (Badura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart, & Bartoloemi, 2003; Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000; Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Holland & Huba, 1989; Jones & Kolko, 2002; Micari, Streitwieser, & Light, 2006; McKinney & Reynolds, 2002; Rice & Brown, 1990; Sawyer, Piniarco, & Bedwell, 1997; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2004) while learning specific skills and competencies (Benjamin, 2001; Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2005; Dye & Robison, 2005; Harmon, 2006) which further amplified their experience and made it meaningful. Not only was there a significant gap in the literature regarding the process and methods used for the development and measurement of specific learning outcomes for peer educators, but greater understanding regarding the intentionality and situational context of these efforts was required. There also was a deficiency regarding how the results of the assessment of these outcomes are used to evaluate peer educator performance and whether or not the desired learning outcomes are achieved. More information was also needed concerning how this information is used to improve the peer education experience for peer educators. This study provided useful information that could assist program coordinators with program development and the assessment of student learning outcomes for students serving as peer educators. Study findings allowed the researcher to provide recommendations to program coordinators on how to design and assess learning processes to evaluate peer educator performance and assist with the modification and improvement of the experience for peer educators.
Chapter Summary

Peer educators are widely used by colleges and universities to assist with first-year students’ transition to the collegiate experience. Because it has been increasingly documented that peer educators progress through processes of developmental growth and learning as a result of their experiences, it was vitally important to understand the ways in which learning outcomes for peer educators are developed and measured. This would allow program coordinators to more effectively contribute to the developmental experiences of these students. This study addressed this issue by reviewing the literature on peer education programs and the processes of personal development and learning that peer educators experience through their participation in these programs; reviewing the literature on the assessment of student learning outcomes, specifically with regards to peer educator settings; and exploring the process and methods used by program coordinators to develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators to discover how the information gathered through this process is used to evaluate peer educator performance, determine whether or not the designated outcomes have been achieved, and understand how it is used to improve the experience for the peer educators. The researcher expected that this study would help address the lack of information regarding the assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Power of Peer Influence and Support

The central theoretical concept behind peer education is that students can have a significant impact on the attitudes and behavior of fellow students (Newton & Ender, 1980; Sloane & Zimmer, 1993). Because students often share similar values and interests, they are more likely to respond to the influence of peers who can facilitate and encourage behavioral change (Gates & Kennedy, 1989). Research has indicated that students who decide to serve as peer educators are largely motivated by a desire to assist fellow students, often as a result of the manner in which they were helped as new students at a college or university (Harmon, 2006; Klein, Sondag, & Drolet, 1994). It is important to recognize that students rely on fellow students as their primary source for important information as “peers serve as counselors, teachers, role models, and enablers for each other, regardless of their ability to do so” (Sloane & Zimmer, p. 242). Peer educators have enormous potential for facilitating personal development among fellow students due to the potential power of the peer-group relationship (Newton & Ender). As a result, the power of peer influence and support, particularly their influence on student retention and attrition issues, has been well documented in the literature.

Some of the earliest discussion on the power of peer influence in higher education was provided by Tinto (1975). Using Durkheim’s Theory of Suicide (1961) as a model, his primary goal was to develop a theoretical explanation of the factors related to college persistence and attrition. His extensive analysis of the trends and characteristics affecting college student dropout
led him to describe student attrition or persistence as a longitudinal process that occurred because of the meanings students assigned to their interactions in a college setting. He believed attrition within higher education was directly related to insufficient integration into certain aspects of life at a college or university and theorized that an individual’s decision about persistence was related to his or her social integration at the institution. His theory also stated that the ability of students to successfully connect to a peer group significantly affected whether or not they would remain in college. Positive social interactions with peers, specifically in developing friendships, resulted in the development of effective social communication skills as well as increased feelings of comfort with and adjustment to college, while negative interactions with peers directly impacted the increased possibility of poor academic performance and withdrawal from the institution.

A decade after Tinto’s (1975) model on student persistence and attrition, Bean (1985) designed a conceptual model based on factors influencing college dropout syndrome and reported that peer influence had the greatest impact on the socialization and social integration of other students. He discovered that students more significantly impacted the attitudes and behaviors of other students than did faculty members and were an important factor in determining whether or not their peers would be retained at a college or university. He also emphasized the potential power of peer support and influence at large institutions with low-faculty student contact and recommended the potential usage of older students in assisting newer students with successfully integrating to life at the institution. This recommendation was significant in that it directly suggested developing a formal peer role whose primary responsibility would be to provide the necessary guidance and support related to the successful adjustment of new students at a college or university.
While Tinto and Bean focused specifically on the power of individual peers on student retention and attrition trends, Astin (1996) provided insight into the potential impact of the peer group through his focus on what mattered most in college. Discussing results from a follow-up study to his landmark research, he reported that peer influence was one of the three most significant factors affecting involvement in the life of an institution. He emphasized that peer influence was the single most important form of involvement affecting the educational and personal development of college students as interactions with a peer group more intensely involved students in their educational experiences. He further indicated the importance of interactions with the peer group by emphasizing that a group of peers, operating through interactions he described as “peer networking” (p.130), had a significant influence on whether or not fellow students were more likely to engage in volunteerism and community service activities. He recommended that more attention be given to activities and experiences which facilitated these types of positive interactions.

Peer influence and interactions not only had a significant impact on whether or not fellow students would remain at a college or university but also greatly affected the amount of support students experienced as a result of these interactions. Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2000) conducted a study examining the psychosocial and instrumental support provided by peer mentors to students in a graduate level psychology program, the relationship between support and student satisfaction with peer mentors, and the amount of stress experienced by graduate students. They discovered that peers influenced the mentored students to such a degree that they experienced an increase in both types of support. They also learned that higher levels of psychosocial support were provided when compared to instrumental support and that while peers not only provided the same support and influence as traditional mentors of a greater age and
hierarchal level, they also offered a greater amount of psychosocial support than traditional mentors. This discovery validated earlier research literature which suggested that peers could have as powerful an influence on fellow students as traditional mentors, particularly in areas of emotional and social support. Students who experienced higher levels of support reported greater satisfaction with their mentoring relationships.

Peer educator roles potentially provide students with educational benefits which affect the students’ personal growth and development, particularly given the previous research on the importance of peer influence in ensuring that college students successfully adjust to life at the institution. However, it could also be inferred from this research that while peer educators have a significant amount of impact upon the students whom their various roles are designed to serve, enormous potential remains for the peer educators to also benefit from these types of experiences.

**Historical Usage of Peer Educators in U.S. Higher Education**

Peer educators have widely been used throughout the history of higher education in the United States in order to provide support and guidance to fellow students. There has long been an assumption that students desire instruction from peers rather than professionals. “This assumption, with its theoretical roots traced to social learning theory, is based on the observation that friends seek advice from friends and are also influenced by the expectations, attitudes, and behaviors of the groups to which they belong” (Lindsey, 1997, p.187). The use of undergraduate students in various peer educator roles designed to help ease the transition to the college experience can be traced to Colonial America and the oldest known role of the peer tutor (Ender & Newton, 2000; Materniak, 1984). The most visible peer educator function, the role of the resident assistant, has existed since the early 1900s (Ender 1984; Ender & Newton). The
longevity of peer educator roles in higher education within the United States could lead to an assumption that a great deal of research tracing the history and trends of peer educators over time should exist. Unfortunately, detailed research on the historical trends of using peer educators has only occurred within the past 40 years.

One of the earliest research studies to focus specifically on the usage of peer educators in higher education in the United States was conducted by Brown and Zunker (1966) and dealt with the manner in which student counselors were used to provide guidance to first-year students. The researchers discovered that approximately 63% of reporting institutions used peer educators as counselors, with the vast majority being assigned to provide support within the residence halls and during new student orientation. They noted the beginnings of the usage of student counselors for the function of offering guidance to fellow students on academic adjustment issues and also reported that individualized, one-on-one counseling served as the predominant role offered by these peer educators. However, perhaps one of the most important findings of this initial study was the expectation of approximately 75% of study participants that the use of peer educators in the student counseling function would likely increase during the following 10 years.

In 1975, Zunker conducted a survey of how four-year institutions used peer educators and discovered that 76% of study respondents indicated using students in these types of positions. This increase confirmed the initial expectation reported by Brown and Zunker a decade earlier that colleges and universities expected to expand their usage of peer educators over the course of the subsequent 10 years. While the predominant role of peer educators continued to be focused around the functions of individualized involvement within the residence halls and support given during new student orientation, the survey indicated the first signs of the expansion of the roles
of peer educators as an increasing number of institutions had begun using these students in functions related to academic support and career planning.

Out of a desire to examine the usage of peer educators since Zunker’s 1975 study, Winston and Ender (1988) surveyed college student affairs divisions. They designed questionnaires based in part on earlier studies (Brown & Zunker, 1966; Zunker 1975) and reported that 72% of study respondents featured at least one peer education program within the division of student affairs, a finding that indicated little change in usage when compared to Zunker’s finding of 76% in 1975. They also reported that peer educators were used most extensively in the residence halls and new student orientation, another finding which was consistent with the earlier studies on which they based their survey. However, they uncovered a major change in the usage of peer educators since the earlier studies with greater expansion and diversification of peer educator roles beyond the traditional residence hall and orientation settings to include areas such as academic advising, financial aid, student activities, and student judicial programs.

Nearly 20 years after Zunker’s study, Carns, Carns, and Wright (1993) replicated his research, investigating the use of peer educators in four-year institutions, and learned that 83% of responding institutions utilized students in a variety of peer roles. These results indicated an increase from the 1975 study and a significant change from the 63% originally reported by Zunker and Brown in 1966. They also confirmed the continued expansion of peer educator roles beyond the traditional residence hall setting discovered by Ender and Newton (1988) and uncovered a new trend in the use of peer educators over time, from roles involving an individualized, one-on-one approach to more situations involving group-oriented approaches.
Ender (1984) explained several important reasons for the increased usage and expansion of peer educators over time. He stated that peer educators significantly impacted the personal growth and development of the students with whom they worked while enabling college and universities to offer a wider variety of campus services at a lower cost to the institution. He also explained that using peer educators allowed professional staff members more freedom and time to devote to the development of services for which they had specific training and expertise. A review of the literature found that no additional research on the usage of peer educators in higher education has been uncovered since the Carns, Carns, and Wright study in the early 1990s. The research also revealed that the apparent trend over time is that a major study on this issue is conducted about once each decade. It is expected that there will likely be an update to one of these studies within the next few years. However, while it is important to understand the historical usage of peer educators over time, greater attention must be given to the effects of the peer education experience on the peer educators themselves.

Impact of Peer Education Experience on Personal Development of Peer Educators

Peer education involves the usage of helping skills where peer educators “must exhibit a high degree of self-awareness and self-understanding” (Ender & McFadden, 1980, p.129), recognize that they are role models, and understand their “ability to use peer group relationships to mold the overall development of students who are being served” (p.129). Students who serve as peer educators are often described as individuals who exhibit a high energy level and have an ability to remain open-minded and impartial while highly effective peer educators embody certain specific characteristics such as high self-esteem, a willingness to be open to a variety of interests, a greater tendency for tolerance, and a natural inquisitive nature (Russel & Skinkle, 1990). According to Ender and Newton (2000), students involved in this type of position also
have a dedicated commitment to being a part of another student’s life for a significant amount of time. They argue that successful peer educators are determined to be flexible and recognize that making a difference in the lives of other students require a sustained effort over time; they also are able to listen to the concerns of the students with whom they interact without judging their personal decisions and choices. Ender and Newton suggest that not only do peer educators empathize with the struggles or problems their students face as well as their personal feelings, they also identify barriers which may potentially inhibit student success and offer suggestions on possible alternatives to overcome these barriers. Effective peer educators are those who are open to learning new things and being significantly changed by the relationship they have with their students, a developmental change which has received a significant amount of attention within the research literature.

The suggestion that students serving as peer educators potentially benefit from their experiences originated with a model proposed by Delworth, Sherwood, and Cassaburi (1974). This model, which examined the potential usage and implementation of peer education programs in higher education, offered the idea that peer educators gained specific academic and interpersonal skills and increased feelings of competence, self-worth, and confidence. They stated that peer educators would also be more likely to explore educational and career interests and possibly make vocational changes as a result of their experiences. They also theorized that these students would experience personal satisfaction as result of being more involved in the life of the university and having opportunities to attempt to change the system. However, despite the proposition of this model and suggestions of the potential educational and developmental benefits to peer educators, no significant research emerged in this area until nearly 20 years later.
In 1989, Holland and Huba examined whether or not peer educators who provided support during new student orientation were positively impacted psychosocially by their experience. Using the Student Developmental Task Inventory (Winston, Miller, & Prince, 1979) as a means of examining the developmental task achievement of the peer educators, the researchers discovered that the peer educators achieved gains in areas of autonomy, interdependence, and tolerance. They suggested that developmental growth in areas of interdependence and tolerance occurred as a direct result of peer educator interactions with students and parents from diverse backgrounds and that the overall psychosocial development experienced was the result of the peer educators working together to achieve a common goal such as providing support to new students.

Rice and Brown (1990) further investigated the developmental level of college students and self-perceptions of their competence to serve as peer educators in a mentoring role and discovered a relationship between developmental measures and mentor competency. They learned that perceptions of mentor confidence could be predicted by measures of interpersonal relationships and sense of purpose. They also discovered that students who perceived themselves to be highly competent as mentors were more likely to have a high sense of purpose and be open to developing new interpersonal relationships. Students serving as peer mentors reported feeling the greatest level of confidence when addressing issues related to interpersonal and leadership skills.

Using Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors of college student development, Jones and Kolko (2002) conducted a qualitative study examining the psychosocial development of peer mentors and learned that mentors experienced significant growth along several vectors, specifically those related to identity development. They discovered that as a result of their
experience, mentors were able to improve personal competence, achieving gains in self-esteem and self-assurance, particularly with regard to their personal communication skills. They also learned that the peer mentoring experience led student mentors to achieve a stronger sense of purpose as they clarified personal and professional goals. Mentors developed a stronger sense of integrity, as well as social and personal responsibility, as their personal values were altered as a result of balancing their own interests with those of their mentees. Mentors were able to recognize and reflect upon the significant impact the experience had on their own psychosocial development and, as a result, were better able to affect the development of the students they mentored.

Sawyer, Pinciaro, and Bedwell (1997) conducted a mixed methods study examining changes in self-esteem, personal development, and sexual behavior over a one-year period for 65 peer sexual health educators from 10 universities and discovered that these students experienced improved levels in each area studied. Participants experienced increased levels of self-esteem and also reported practicing safer levels of sexual behavior while improving communication in their sexual relationships as a result of serving as peer sexual health educators. Approximately 20% of study participants initiated a change in career paths as a result of the experience and typically chose a career in one of the health professions.

Using pre-test and post-test questionnaires, Badura, Millard, Peluso, and Ortman (2000) studied the effects of participation in a peer educator training program on peer health educators. Attempting to uncover specific outcomes that resulted from participation in peer educator training, they found that peer educators were positively affected through their participation in training and experienced significant improvement in areas of leadership, position relevant knowledge, and personal health behaviors. They reported that while peer educators did not
appear to experience any improvement on measures of self-esteem as a result of participation in training, the lack of improvement in this competency measure was likely related to the fact that students who desired to serve as peer educators and assist others already exemplified high levels of self-confidence to such a degree that training did little to improve or hinder these levels.

Good, Halpin, and Halpin (2000) researched the academic and interpersonal development of peer mentors participating in a first-year minority engineering program and learned that mentors experienced unexpected academic gains and cognitive growth in areas such as critical thinking and problem solving skills. These gains occurred as mentors realized their potential as role models for first-year students and internalized the learning strategies they were taught in training workshops for usage with their student mentees as part of their own personal development. Mentors also reported gaining a more comprehensive understanding of core engineering concepts which assisted them with their own academic progression. They experienced important interpersonal development gains in areas of social interaction and communication, personal responsibility, and sense of purpose. As mentors worked with their students, they experienced self-satisfaction which provided a sense of inclusion and further solidified their identity.

In a qualitative study designed to examine the effects of participation in a peer instruction program where students served as mentors to students who experienced academic difficulties, McKinney and Reynolds (2002) found that peer instructors experienced significant gains in areas of confidence, academic achievement, and self-regulating behaviors. Behavioral changes also resulted in areas such as time management, study habits, social interactions, and classroom participation and peer instructors became more self-motivated. They also discovered that peer
instructors became more self-reflective as a result of their experiences and applied the evolution of their thoughts and critical thinking skills to career aspirations.

Hamid (2006), as part of a multi-site case study approach, focused on using social interdependence theory in order to predict the impact participation in a peer leader program had on students who served as peer leaders. She learned that interactions between first-year students and peer leaders were positive and cooperative interactions which influenced the psychological adjustment and social competence of the leaders. Peer leaders made a strong effort to successfully fulfill their roles, worked hard to develop and maintain positive relationships with the students with whom they worked, and achieved self-actualization and acquired personal and professional skills as a result of the experience. She discovered that the experiences of peer leaders not only confirmed social interdependence theory as a model useful for predicting the kind of experiences peer leaders have, but also discovered that the leaders were significantly changed by their experiences.

A qualitative study by Micari, Streitwieser, and Light (2006) examined peer leaders who facilitated peer learning in a science-based program at a research institution in order to understand how the peer leaders benefited from their experience. They discovered three areas of growth where the peer leaders reported achieving developmental gains: cognitive growth, personal growth, and instrumental growth. In the area of cognitive growth, the peer leaders reported developing a greater ability to process and comprehend the information for which they were responsible for providing in the peer learning workshops. Facilitating the peer learning workshops also allowed the peer leaders to develop enhanced problem-solving skills as well as have a more comprehensive understanding of their academic discipline as they were able to make profound connections between basic and advanced conceptual ideas in the discipline. The
researchers also discovered that in the area of personal growth, peer leaders indicated that they greatly improved their interpersonal communication skills and gained a greater understanding of what it meant to be a teacher while developing strategies to assist their students with problem solving. Understanding the instructional role of being a teacher in the classroom also helped peer leaders gain a greater appreciation and enjoyment of the importance of role modeling and helping their peers learn workshop information. The peer leaders not only valued the cognitive and personal growth they experienced but also were able to immediately apply these gains instrumentally as they made connections to their existing career and professional goals. Their experience also provided them with the means to discover and consider new possibilities for future career goals in their academic discipline.

Impact of Peer Education Experience on Peer Educator Learning

The research literature presented numerous examples of the important impact peer education has on the personal growth and development of the students serving as peer educators. Newton and Ender (1980), discussing a programming model for peer education, argued that in order to be competent and effective, peer educators must first develop a foundational knowledge base from which they act and share information with other students. They remarked that through an assessment of personal growth, attitudes, and abilities, peer educators should apply the information they have gained to their own learning and integrate this knowledge as part of the abilities required in order to help other students. However, while a significant portion of the literature has been devoted to studying the impact of the peer education experience, particularly from a psychosocial perspective, studies addressing the learning processes and outcomes which result as part of students’ association with involvement as peer educators have only recently emerged.
Puchkoff and Font-Padron (1990) conducted perhaps the earliest research study related to learning outcomes for peer education through an examination of the long-term gains experienced by peer educators. They designed a survey to assess career applications of skills and knowledge gained from participation as peer counselors and discovered that peer educators claimed that their experiences served as “one of the most valuable growth experiences during the college years” (p. 571). Peer educators also reported transferring the administrative, listening, and relationship skills they had learned to career and employment situations. They remarked that they gained greater insight into themselves while experiencing personal growth in interpersonal relationships, intellectual growth, and acceptance of self. This study indicated that peer educators not only were significantly affected personally and professionally by their experiences but also learned how to apply the skills they gained to various vocational settings.

Nearly 10 years later, Benjamin (2001) provided a qualitative study designed to explore the perceived meaning that the peer education experience had for students serving as peer mentors in learning communities as well as what mentors learned from their experiences. He discovered that the students serving as peer mentors learned how to perform their jobs through observations of those with whom they interacted. He also found that supervisors had an important impact upon mentors by providing them with expectations which served as models for appropriate behavior. Mentors learned from each other by sharing ideas which provided models for effective practice. However, Benjamin discovered that the most significant impact upon peer mentor learning was through interactions with the students being mentored in the learning communities. Mentors observed the actions of their students, whether positive or negative, and began to understand who their students were and what approaches they could best use in order to mentor these students.
Badura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart, and Bartoloemi (2003) conducted narrative analysis of 21 volunteer peer health educators and learned that student participation as peer educators resulted in a variety of positive outcomes and benefits for the students involved. Peer educators gained greater knowledge about health-related information and benefited from being able to help fellow students while intentionally providing a positive contribution to society. The students serving as peer educators also reported experiencing significant personal growth as a result of their experiences. Interactions with different people allowed them to learn more about themselves and fellow students. Peer educators also specifically reported improvement in public speaking and stated that the relationships they developed with the peer education program instructor and fellow peer educators resulted in stronger relationships with their peers.

Dye, Pinnegar, and Robinson (2005) developed a narrative study to understand how peer mentors working in first-year residential learning communities were bound together by the experience as well as what they learned from it. They discovered that mentors learned through a process of vicarious self-reflection where their interactions with the students whom they mentored forced them to realize they were agents of change who could influence the behaviors of their students. Peer mentors constructed a network of support with other mentors, a structure which was found to be crucial to their learning process. Mentors, through their various interactions with other students, also realized the importance of taking responsibility for positively influencing these students while recognizing that personal choice plays an important role in changing student behaviors. The mentors learned that students must be responsible for their own actions and that real change in student behavior only occurs with time as a result of building trust in interpersonal relationships with students rather than forcing change upon them.
Using a mixed-methods study, Bentley, Cradit, and Jackson (2006) focused on learning outcomes associated with undergraduate peer mentoring and reported that overall, mentors experienced learning in areas such as program development and supervision, interpersonal communication skills, self-awareness and understanding, leading experiential exercises, and institutional knowledge. They also discovered that learning outcomes differed according to gender with female mentors reporting more positive learning outcomes than male mentors. The researchers suggested that while no survey comparisons for males were significant, positive mean changes in several areas suggested that males did experience at least some positive learning from their experiences and perhaps could be explained by the fact that male mentors may have different learning expectations and motivations for learning than female mentors. Male mentors reported different gains than female mentors, focusing more on how their experiences aided their personal and educational goal achievement, a signal that male mentors may have assigned different meaning to what was learned than did female mentors.

Harmon (2006) conducted a qualitative study on the learning processes and outcomes associated with students serving as peer mentors in a first-year learning community and discovered that mentors were linked together by their mentoring experiences and learned through collaborative and self-reflective processes. He found that peer mentors drew on their own experiences as first-year students and integrated the learning from those experiences into their mentoring behaviors. Peer mentors were able to internalize appropriate mentoring behaviors into their own mentoring style based on their reflections concerning interactions with former mentors and each other. Mentors learned about organizational and planning skills and group dynamics from their experiences. They also gained an acute awareness of the diverse learning styles and needs of students and were able to adapt their mentoring approaches to meet these styles.
Harmon discovered that mentoring forced students serving as peer mentors to learn how to successfully interact with individuals on different learning levels than their own and adapt their mentoring behaviors to develop a means for better communicating and motivating students with different needs. The self-reflective learning process mentors experienced as part of this process allowed them to immediately internalize and apply their learning experiences, which helped mentors to recognize their own growth and development throughout the mentoring process. Mentors applied what they learned to personal situations, enabling them to become better at identifying personal strengths and weaknesses while using the skills and knowledge they gained to adapt to their own personal mentoring challenges. As a result, students serving as peer mentors learned how to practically apply what they learned from the mentoring experience within their own career fields.

The literature indicated that peer educators experience significant developmental and learning gains as a result of their experiences. Unfortunately, no additional studies regarding the types of learning processes and outcomes associated with students serving as peer educators were found within the research literature, a sign that more research is required in order to fully explore this area. Consideration must be given to the importance of using student learning outcomes as part of the peer education experience, especially given the apparent lack of research literature in this specific area of higher education. Before that important issue can be fully explored, a discussion on the literature related to the assessment of student learning outcomes is required.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Palomba and Banta (1999) defined assessment as “a process that focuses on student learning, a process that involves reviewing and reflecting on practice as academics have always
done, but in a more planned and careful way” (p.1). Astin (1996) suggested that an important assessment issue in educational reform dealt with the development of specific outcomes based upon the consideration of what they should include. He stated that all outcomes were based upon value judgments where programs and services were considered desirable or undesirable based on the value assigned to specific outcomes. He also argued that outcomes should be structured in such a way as to effectively measure both the cognitive and affective gains which institutions valued in their students. Bersciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004) specified that learning outcomes offer detailed statements, often based on pre-determined goals and objectives, about what students are expected to know or be able to do as the result of their participation in a specific initiative or program and indicated that the assessment of these outcomes provides an important means for measuring whether or not learning and development actually resulted. However, the assessment of student learning outcomes in higher education is a recent trend whose origins date until the early to mid 1980s when a series of national reports and state political leaders first provided calls for the means to gauge the performance of college students as a way of keeping colleges and universities accountable (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Shuh & Upcraft, 2001; Upcraft & Shuh, 1996).

As part of a newly sustained emphasis on accountability in higher education, greater attention was directed to whether or not colleges and universities were helping college students to develop their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (Terenzini, 1989). Concerns about the increasing costs of higher education, the quality of instruction, and issues of access and equity, made the American public no longer content with just having faith in the idea that American higher education was meeting its intended purpose (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Shuh & Upcraft, 2001; Terenzini; Upcraft & Shuh, 1996). Increased attention became focused on the expectations
of what students should be gaining from their collegiate experiences as well as the reality of what they actually were gaining from those experiences. Assessment forced colleges and universities to become introspective by examining their fundamental purposes as well as their expectations for the outcomes of curricular and co-curricular programming (Terenzini). The assessment of student learning outcomes became vitally important in measuring the effectiveness of colleges and universities, as well as their specific programs and services, and this form of assessment became increasingly tied to institutional reaccreditation efforts by regional accrediting associations (Palomba & Banta; Shuh & Upcraft; Terenzini; Upcraft & Shuh).

While there was an increased emphasis being placed on assessing student learning outcomes in order to keep colleges and universities accountable, Ewell (1987), in a discussion on establishing a campus-based assessment program, stated that individual colleges and universities were the ones who were responsible for determining which outcomes to measure and that this decision should be related to the mission of the institution and the student population the institution was designed to serve. He remarked that most assessment programs which examined the undergraduate experience focused largely on four basic dimensions of outcomes: knowledge outcomes, or those related to cognition; skills outcomes, or those related to application; attitudes and values outcomes, or those related to experience and cultural context; and behavioral outcomes, or those related to actions which are expressions of acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes. He argued that, in order to develop a successful campus-based assessment program, colleges and universities should first analyze their missions and instructional goals and select the best approach to examining each of these outcome areas based on this analysis.

Halpern (1987) remarked that the specific assessment of student learning outcomes provided an important response to concerns about the quality of higher education and offered the
institution valuable feedback for improvement. She argued that examination of the processes
through which students learn, as well as the outcomes of what they learn, provided a more direct
measure of institutional quality rather than focusing on traditional measures of quality such as
the size of the institution, retention rates, or the amount of research being conducted. She also
emphasized that the assessment of student learning outcomes could serve as an important
catalyst for programmatic change within higher education institutions and could lead to
improved institutional quality.

Upcraft and Shuh (1996), discussing assessment practice in college student affairs,
presented a comprehensive model for assessment and recommended the inclusion of learning
outcomes as an important part of that model. They argued that it was vitally important to know
whether or not student usage of campus programs, services, or facilities resulted in any
significant changes in their learning, development, or success. They also provided an important
context for the assessment of learning outcomes in relation to the influence of the college peer
group on students’ learning and development: “Increasing interest in, and commitment to,
assessment of college student learning and development demand examination of students’
experiences ‘while they are with us,’ including – perhaps especially – their experiences with
their peers” (p. 189). This context indicated that the learning outcomes of peer education
programs should be tied more closely to the experiences of the students who served as peer
educators, an exploration of which is proposed by this research study.

In a discussion of assessment essentials for colleges and universities, Palomba and Banta
(1999) remarked that the purpose of assessment was to offer educators information about
educational programs in such a way that they could determine whether or not those programs
contributed to the growth and development of college students. They recommended that a panel
of campus administrators and faculty work together to determine specific knowledge, skills, and values all students should possess upon graduation from the institution. They argued that in order for assessment efforts to be successful, educators should be intentionally purposeful with regards to the information they gathered and should specify learning goals and objectives prior to data collection. They also emphasized the important potential of using assessment results in order to modify and improve programs and services.

Maki (2004) ventured one step further than Palomba and Banta and recommended that colleges and universities should develop learning outcome statements at the institutional and programmatic levels in order to engage students and provide them with opportunities to reflect upon their learning and take responsibility for it. She specified that these statements were different from program and institutional objectives which offered more general parameters for student learning in that they designated what students should learn or comprehend as a result of their educational experiences. She remarked that learning outcome statements could serve as indications of “what students should demonstrate, represent, or produce in relation to how and what they have learned” (p.60) and could provide coherence across multiple levels of an institution which would allow students to better understand their educational experiences as well as have greater clarity about the designated outcomes for those experiences.

Skipper (2005) provided an important framework for the importance of involving students in the assessment process. She greatly encouraged the use of self-assessment as a means for students to “reflect on who they are, what they have done and why, and how they have changed – all extremely powerful questions” (p.103). In addition, she remarked that the use of self-assessment techniques prior to and immediately following the experience in which they were engaged could help students to reflect upon and offer their own perspectives on their learning
while offering valuable insight into the developmental change which may have occurred as a result of that experience.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes within Peer Education

A relationship between the increasing assessment of student learning outcomes in higher education and the specific assessment of learning outcomes within peer education was provided by Allen (1993), who recommended that the development of peer education programs include the establishment of specific goals designed to guide program development and the implementation of an evaluation process. She emphasized the importance of providing the students serving as peer educators with “individually oriented evaluation standards so that students will understand exactly what is expected of them” (p. 294) as well as consistently offering feedback on how they performed. Within peer education programs, “Program goals and objectives should be established, written in behavioral terms, and disseminated to individuals on campus who are affected by the program intervention” (Ender, 1984, p. 13). Croll, Jurs, and Kennedy (1993) also suggested that peer education programs feature certain issues related to quality assurance which could be measured by approaches featuring both process and outcome evaluation. Specifically, process evaluation could be used to examine satisfaction with the specific methods used by peer educators while outcome evaluation could be used to measure the effectiveness of specific interventions in facilitating changes in student behavior, examples which indicated that there was at least some utility in developing and measuring learning outcomes for peer educators.

In a discussion of the common features of peer education programs, Keeling and Engstrom (1993) provided an important call for using a strategic planning approach within peer education programs based on evaluation and needs assessments in order to respond to campus
needs. They argued that strategic planning could help identify the essential roles and responsibilities in which peer educators should be involved in order to promote program success and effectiveness. According to the researchers, “The most important characteristic of an enhanced peer education program is its ability to sense, monitor, and react to change – a quality that makes programs durable, popular, and indispensable” (p. 259). They argued that in order to react to change, peer education programs should rely on information from campus assessments, particularly information related to the competence and effectiveness of the peer educators. They also stated that a challenge facing peer educator programs revolved around how to best match peer educator talents, skills, and abilities with the most appropriate tasks involved as part of the program. They recommended that peer educator training should be continuously evaluated and restructured in order to ensure that peer educators were well prepared to perform their duties and stated that conducting a needs assessment on incoming peer educators could provide an important window into the issues which require attention in order to best meet the needs of these students. They also hinted that an important learning outcome for peer educators should be the development of an awareness of and responsiveness to the diverse learning styles of the students with whom they interacted. They remarked that by embarking on a strategic planning approach in peer education, the potential for peer educators to gain satisfaction and growth from their experiences would be greatly enhanced.

Despite the vast usage of peer educators in various positions at colleges and universities and the growing importance in the assessment of student learning outcomes over time (Brown & Zunker, 1966; Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993; Winston & Ender, 1988; Zunker, 1975), very little attention has been devoted to evaluating peer educator programs and providing evidence for how they resulted in positive change (Ender, 1984; Fennell, 1993). This is extremely disappointing
given that as early as 1974, Delworth, Sherwood, and Casaburri recommended constructing a definitive system of evaluation for peer education programs to assist with the establishment and measurement of programmatic goals. They argued that the evaluation of the intended objectives of peer education programs would allow program coordinators to know whether or not specific outcomes had been achieved. Using the example of a peer education program at Colorado State University as part of their discussion, they provided a context for the assessment of the benefits of the peer education experience on peer educators by suggesting that it was important to devote at least some assessment efforts to understand how peer educators were changed by the program as well as what they gained from participation in it, a suggestion which supported the development and measurement of learning outcomes for these peer educators.

Ender (1983) further recommended that effective peer education programs should include both formative and summative evaluation of individual peer educators throughout their term of service. He suggested conducting these evaluations as developmental interviews whose primary purpose would be focused on the personal growth and development of the peer educators. These interviews would involve “establishing personal and work-related goals, helping the student to assess readiness to complete these goals, developing behavioral objectives for goal accomplishment, and identifying appropriate learning opportunities on campus or in the community” (p. 334). This, at the very least, provided an additional context for developing and assessing the outcomes gained by peer educators as a result of their experiences.

Regardless of the recommendations made by Delworth, Sherwood, and Cassaburi in the 1970s and Ender in the 1980s, a review of the literature revealed no specific research dealing with the development and assessment of learning outcomes for students serving as peer educators. Program coordinators, the vast majority of which used a case study approach to
describe their programs, only periodically wrote about their assessment efforts. These cases often provided general overviews of assessment and evaluation efforts from a programmatic standpoint, with a great deal of attention given to how the affects of the program were measured with regards to the students they were intended to serve. For example, Gates and Kennedy (1989), discussing the impact of a peer health education program at Penn State University, reported that participants in workshops facilitated by peer health educators evaluated their performance in order to improve the quality of the program. Peer educators received favorable evaluations in areas of knowledge of the subject matter being presented as well as workshop preparation, organization, and presentation. As a result, workshop participants stated that they learned relevant health-related information which assisted them with making behavioral change. This example not only indicated the important impact peer educators could make on fellow students but also provided an additional example of successful evaluation efforts within a peer education program.

Perhaps a more important example of the successful use of an assessment within a peer education program involved a formative assessment approach conducted at the University of Portland (Tenney & Houck, 2004) where peer leaders facilitating chemistry and biology workshops based around the concept of peer led team learning (PLTL) were required to maintain journals and write reflection papers about their experiences. Anonymous surveys were also conducted to gather information on the perceptions peer leaders had of the workshops from their own perspectives. The survey results revealed that serving as peer leaders greatly enhanced knowledge comprehension of chemistry and biology concepts. Analysis of journal entries and reflection papers over a four year period also revealed that peer leaders reflected that they had improved knowledge of content around which the workshops were developed while gaining an
appreciation for teaching other peers. The peer leaders reported gaining important teaching and interpersonal skills, and the assessment revealed that the peer leader experience was so beneficial to the peer leaders that it caused many of them to now consider teaching as a potential career goal.

While some of the case studies uncovered by the researcher discussed the gains peer educators achieved, there was no indication that they were based on any intentionally pre-designated learning outcomes. In fact, only one example was discovered which suggested that an approach to develop and measure learning outcomes had been used. Important examples of the specific assessment approaches which led to the discovery of peer educator gains are provided in the next section of this chapter. However, the lack of any substantive research in this area of peer education offers an important opportunity for examination of the process through which learning outcomes are developed and measured by peer education program coordinators.

Case Studies of Assessment and Evaluation within Peer Education

Holly (1987), using a case study approach on the usage of peer counselors at a small, liberal arts college, reported that these peer educators were annually required to complete a variety of self-evaluations to improve their performance and effectiveness with the students whom they counseled. Peer counselors completed a subjective summary reflecting on their performance as peer counselors during the year which could be used for program improvement. The feedback provided by former peer counselors indicated that they integrated what they learned from their experiences and applied it to family situations and career decisions, a discussion which suggested that participation in an evaluation process helped peer counselors to reflect on the learning they achieved as part of their experience.
As part of a quality assurance evaluation at Penn State University, Croll, Jurs, and Kennedy (1993) provided a case study for how the performance of peer health educators can be measured. They explained that the Office of Health Promotion and Education evaluated these peer educators at various points throughout the course of the program. Before being certified, each aspiring educator was first evaluated on their knowledge of subject matter and presentation skills following an intensive training program and required to achieve a certain score in order to be certified. After certification was achieved, new peer educators were then evaluated on their performance in facilitating various health-related workshops by workshop participants as well as through a self-evaluative approach in order to gain insight into the peer educators’ perceptions regarding their performance. A peer review system was also initiated to evaluate peer educator skills in areas such as knowledge, delivery, and sensitivity. Croll, Jurs, and Kennedy reported that an evaluation of the presentations of 24 peer educators during the year revealed that all but four achieved acceptable performance ratings overall. However, from this evaluation, they learned that a significant number of peer educators only achieved a fair rating in issues related to delivery and sensitivity. They stated that modifications were made to peer educator training and in-service programming using these results, an excellent example of how the assessment of the specific learning experiences of peer educators could be used to modify training in order to respond to issues of concern to the peer educators while making the experience more beneficial for them.

Gittleman and Woolf (2001) offered a case study of peer teaching at Tufts University and explained that during end-of-semester evaluations, peer teachers indicated a different set of outcomes than the students who they taught in the program. These evaluations, structured as a short narrative assessing their experience, indicated that the peer teachers who served in this
position increased self-knowledge and decision making. The evaluations also revealed that service in the program caused peer teachers to gain greater clarity regarding their education while developing organizational, relational, and communication skills.

Reflecting on the implementation of peer educators in a supplemental instructional model at an urban community college, Zaritsky (2001) remarked that peer educators completed evaluative essays of their experience each semester and indicated a significant number of positive outcomes. The peer educators responded on these evaluations that they developed a more complex knowledge of the subject matter for the courses for which they were providing academic support and increased their self-confidence through being a resource to peers. They also stated that their educational and career aspirations increased as a result of the experience and the high levels of personal satisfaction they received from providing academic support to other students.

Poulton and Kemeny (2001), discussing the University of Arizona’s usage of peer educators to assist undergraduate students in developing computer skills, stated that peer educators completed a written essay at the end of the semester which asked them to reflect on their reasons for joining the program and what they had gained from it. They reported that the peer educators consistently indicated in their essays that they had rewarding and educational experiences. In the discussion of suggestions for how to replicate this program, they emphasized the important educational potential of the experience, stating, “Perhaps the most important advice from replicating this model is to always keep in mind that you are providing an educational opportunity for the [peer educators]” (p. 97), a suggestion which indicates that program coordinators should consider the learning experiences of those students who serve in these types of positions as they design future programs.
The three case studies provided by Gittleman and Woolf, Poulton and Kemeny, and Zaritsky indicated the important use of personal reflection a method for an evaluative process for peer education programs. However, a more comprehensive and multi-method approach was presented in a case study of freshman interests groups at Indiana University (Thompson, Westfall, & Reimers, 2001). Program coordinators assessed 21 peer educators over a nine month period using a variety of methods including reflective statements, focus groups, and questionnaires and indicated their surprise at the unexpected outcomes gained by the peer educators. They learned that reflective statements offered important assessment data as peer educators “wrote freely and without prompts about the outcomes most salient in their minds” (p. 57). Peer educators reported the positive impact of collaboration with their peers as a means of resolving problems and issues of concern as well as sharing new ideas concerning teaching practices. Interactions with students allowed peer educators to gain improved study skills, problem solving, leadership skills, time management skills, and organizational skills. These assessments also indicated that the peer educators learned a great deal about being classroom instructors and how to make class content relevant to the students being taught while adjusting for the various learning styles of their students. They also reported applying the teaching and learning processes they gained from their experience to the way in which they viewed the instructional process, a fact noted by the authors:

…they became more expert as 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. 59)
As a result of this process, peer educators developed a greater understanding of the various challenges of planning and being in charge of a class and stated that they had a new appreciation for faculty and their role in the instructional process. The program coordinators stated that they learned from the assessments that participating in freshman interest groups led peer educators to develop a strong sense of empowerment which assisted in creating a stronger bond toward the institution. This report revealed that using a multi-method assessment approach could greatly assist program coordinators in uncovering specific outcomes gained by students serving as peer educators.

Only one specific example of the development and measurement of a learning outcome for peer educators was uncovered in the literature, another important indicator that greater research is needed in this area. Allen and White (2001), discussing the use of peer educators as group facilitators in problem-based learning courses at the University of Delaware, provided an attempt to measure a student learning outcome for a peer education program. They stated that by the end of their experience peer educators should have heightened content knowledge in the area which they facilitated. Selected items geared toward tutorial methods of instruction, which peer educators answered on the end-of-course evaluation, confirmed that peer educators gained a deeper content knowledge of their specific academic discipline while reflecting on the educational process and developing a deeper understanding of how they and others think and learn. This important example indicated that when program coordinators intentionally designed and measured learning outcomes, they gained a greater understanding of whether or not those outcomes were met as well as the specific benefits experienced by the peer educators in achieving the outcomes.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the specific process through which peer education program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and to discover how the information gathered through this process is used to evaluate peer educator performance, determine whether or not the designated learning outcomes have been achieved, and improve the peer education experience for the peer educators. The researcher used a qualitative design in order to collect the necessary data to address the research questions for this study. According to Patton (1990), qualitative research differs from quantitative methodology because it allows the researcher to study a much smaller group of subjects or specific cases and examine issues in greater depth and detail. This allows the researcher to gain an increased understanding of the situational context surrounding the cases and individuals which are examined. This study was particularly concerned with whether or not program coordinators intentionally design learning outcomes for peer educators as well as the types of outcomes they design for students serving in these positions. Using a qualitative design permitted the researcher not only to examine whether or not the process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators is intentional but also to interpret and describe the situational context in which this process occurs. This study also examined the specific types of outcomes developed for peer educator training and how the results from the assessment of these outcomes are used to measure peer educator performance throughout the term of service. The researcher used the data gathered from this study to describe the manner in which the information gained from the assessment and
measurement of learning outcomes is used by program coordinators to improve the peer education experience for peer educators.

The researcher used a basic interpretive qualitative design in order to describe and gain a deeper understanding of the process used in developing learning outcomes for peer educators, the types of outcomes which result from this process, the methods used for assessing and measuring whether or not the desired outcomes are achieved, and the ways in which the information obtained from this process is used to improve the experience for the peer educators. According to Merriam (2002), a basic interpretive design will allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon or process being studied by examining the perspectives of the people involved. The researcher conducted interviews with selected program coordinators regarding whether or not they had initiated a process involving the development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators and the extent to which the process progressed. Selection of this design was appropriate as it permitted the researcher to understand the intentionality behind this process. It also allowed the researcher to further explore and describe this process in greater detail and permitted the researcher to better understand this process from the perspectives of those individuals who are responsible for the direction and supervision of peer education programs.

Participant Selection

Participants for this research study were program coordinators at colleges and universities within the United States who direct peer education programs designed to serve the needs of first-year students. Only program coordinators who indicated that they had actually initiated a process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators were considered as participants for this study. While there were a wide variety of peer education programs which
provide guidance and support to students throughout their entire collegiate experience, the researcher was not interested in examining peer education programs which provide support beyond the first year of college. Only program coordinators whose programs provided support to students during the crucial first year of college were considered for this study. The residence life field featured numerous examples of peer educators, the most recognized being that of the resident assistant, but as explained in chapter one of this study, the diversity of these programs provided complexity which made it difficult for the researcher to answer the specific research questions of this study. As a result, only program coordinators who directed programs which were not based in a residence life setting were considered for this study.

The researcher developed a research protocol for the selection of participants (see Appendix A) and solicited participation in the research study via an e-mail sent to the national First-Year Experience (FYE) Discussion Listserv and the national First-Year Assessment (FYA) Discussion Listserv. Permission to use these listservs to solicit participants for this study was obtained from the director of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina as this is the organization responsible for the development and maintenance of these listservs. The researcher also sent an additional e-mail soliciting participation in the study to the national Peer Advising Discussion Listserv. Permission to use this listserv was obtained from the IT Manager for the National Academic Advising Association, the organization responsible for the development and maintenance of this listserv. As part of the research protocol sent via e-mail, participants were asked to indicate whether or not they had initiated a process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators. Participants were also asked to indicate whether or not they were willing to participate in detailed interviews regarding the specific process and methods they used. The
researcher used purposeful sampling, a procedure where the researcher intentionally selects study participants in order to answer specific research questions of the study (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003), in order to include the personal reflections of program coordinators and gain a deeper understanding of the process in which they engaged to design and measure learning outcomes for peer educators. This approach allowed the researcher to understand the situational context in which this process was used to develop and assess learning outcomes. It also permitted the researcher to gain a more detailed perspective of how the information gathered from this assessment process was used by program coordinators to improve the peer education experience. Program coordinators who indicated a willingness to participate in this study were asked to provide their contact information and were contacted directly by phone and invited to be a part of the study. Following the initial phone conversation, all interested participants were mailed a letter (see Appendix B) and informed consent form (see Appendix C) explaining the study’s purpose and intended use of the collected data.

Data Collection

This research study involved a basic interpretive qualitative design featuring interviews with 11 program coordinators who initiated a process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators. Qualitative research was ideal for this study because its primary purpose is to help the researcher understand a certain process or phenomenon from the worldview of those involved (Merriam, 2002). In the case of this study, the use of a qualitative design helped the researcher to better understand the process program coordinators used to develop learning outcomes for the peer educators in their programs and to gain insight into the ways the information obtained from this assessment was used by program coordinators. Because little research existed on the process and methods used in designing and assessing learning
outcomes for peer educators, this study examined this process from the perspectives of those individuals who are directly responsible for the supervision of the peer educators and also provided a detailed account of the situational context surrounding the implementation of this process. In addition, particular attention was given to whether or not the process was intentional, how the information gained from the assessment of learning outcomes was used to evaluate whether or not designated learning outcomes were achieved, and how the information obtained from this process was used to improve the peer education experience for the peer educators.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary form of data collection. The researcher created a series of open-ended questions in advance which were used to guide discussion during the interview process (see Appendix E). In qualitative research, interviews are viewed as purposeful conversations which provide the researcher with descriptive data that offer greater insight into the processes or experiences being studied. Semi-structured interviews are designed so that the researcher can have a list of questions or issues to be explored but does not have to follow a specific order when questioning study participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Data from participants was collected during the months May and June in 2007. Interviews were scheduled with 11 interested participants at their convenience and lasted between 50 and 90 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. While it was ideal and hoped that the researcher would conduct interviews in person on the participant’s campus, limited financial resources prevented the researcher from traveling to their institutions. Because all of the participants in this study were more than five hours traveling distance from the researcher’s institution, they were interviewed by phone instead of a one-on-one interview. Phone interviews were conducted in a private departmental office on the researcher’s campus using a speaker phone so that the interviews could be recorded. Use of this office was granted to
the researcher free of charge as the department providing the office also served as the site of the researcher’s graduate assistantship. Participants who were interviewed via phone were required to mail their signed informed consent form to the researcher in advance of the scheduled interview. Participants also completed a sociodemographic data sheet (see Appendix D) prior to the interview in order to provide some basic information which assisted the researcher to accurately describe study participants and the programs which they coordinate. Prior to the beginning of each interview, the researcher reviewed and discussed the informed consent form with participants and allowed them to ask any questions they had about the study. Participants were also informed that if any time during the course of the study, they decided to withdraw from it, they had a right to do so and any records or documentation of their participation would be destroyed. During each interview, the researcher took notes to identify issues which needed further exploration, and additional questions were asked to obtain clarification of these issues so that the researcher could gain a deeper comprehension of the process and methods used by program coordinators.

The researcher also conducted document analysis as an additional form of data collection for this study to supplement the information provided during the interviews with study participants. One of the major benefits of using documents as a potential data source is that they may provide insights into the specific phenomenon being studied while allowing for triangulation with the information provided during an interview as multiple sources of data are being examined (Merriam, 2002). The researcher requested that participants provide access to important documents, where available, such as program proposal and implementation plans, selection and training guidelines, informational brochures, and other relevant documents. The inclusion of document analysis as a form of data collection permitted the researcher to develop a
deeper understanding of the situational context surrounding the process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators and offered a glimpse of intended learning outcomes for peer educators. All participants were required to forward any important program documentation to the researcher prior to the scheduled interview. Clarification questions regarding information on the documents which related to the research questions of this study were asked during the interview so that the researcher had a clear understanding of the documents as well as their potential relationship to the development and assessment of learning outcomes.

**Ethical Considerations**

For research studies involving the use of human subjects, it is especially important to give consideration to their ethical treatment. Providing informed consent and protecting human subjects from potential harm are the two most crucial ethical issues to be considered when developing qualitative methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The e-mail protocol which was sent over the national First-Year Experience Discussion Listserv, the national First-Year Assessment Discussion Listserv, and the national Peer Advising Discussion Listserv to solicit study participants also included a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study as well as a statement of potential future uses of any gathered information. The researcher’s contact information was also listed within the body of this e-mail, and a statement encouraging participants to contact the researcher with any questions they had about the study was included. All program coordinators selected as participants for the study were required to complete an informed consent form which restated the study’s purpose and potential uses of the data. Prior to each interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent form with each participant and provided them with the opportunity to ask any questions about the study. The researcher also
indicated to participants that if, at any point during the study they decided that they wished to withdraw from it, they could choose to do so and all records of their participation would be destroyed.

Because participants in this study are professionals currently working at colleges and universities within the United States, the researcher also provided consideration for maintaining their privacy and confidentiality throughout the entire process of data collection. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identity of study participants, especially during the discussion of research findings. At no time during the course of the study was the specific identity of any college or university used. The researcher used institutional descriptors (i.e. “West Coast Private College” or “Southwest Public University”) to further protect the identity of study participants and their respective institutions. The researcher also ensured that the thoughts and reflections of participants were accurately represented at all times during data collection and analysis and truthfully presented study findings in relation to its purpose and research questions. As a token of appreciation, all participants of this study were offered a $10.00 gift card for a bookstore of their choice.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously, which allows the researcher to compare “emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent categories” (Merriam, 2002, p. 14). This means that the researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection during the course of this study, a major distinction that separates qualitative research from quantitative research. The constant comparative method was used as the data analysis procedure for this research study. This method was most suitable for working with data collected at multiple sites and provided “a research design for multi-data sources,
which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.66). This inductive process involved the constant comparison of data in order to discover whether or not patterns existed across various sets of data (Merriam, 2002). The researcher took notes throughout the interview process and analyzed each interview in order to determine potentially relevant themes which emerged from data collection. Additional questions were asked during the interview process as key themes emerged in order clarify their meaning and confirm them with study participants. All interviews were transcribed verbatim with transcript analysis focused on the identification of specific categories that addressed study research questions. Key passages within each transcript that related to the research questions were identified and coded for placement within relevant categories. Transcript analysis permitted the researcher to describe findings and ascertain their meaning as they related to the purpose and research questions of the study.

Validity and Reliability

One of the major issues within qualitative research methodology concerned internal validity, which deals with how accurately the researcher interprets the reality of the meaning participants assign to a specific situation or phenomenon. The researcher must always be concerned that study findings are reported in a credible and trustworthy manner and match the real experiences of the participants (Merriam, 2002). In this study, the researcher used member checks in order to improve the internal validity of this study and guarantee that the experiences of program coordinators were realistically described and interpreted accurately. All study participants were provided an opportunity to review a copy of their interview transcript and could offer any additional clarifying remarks they felt were necessary. The researcher also used peer examination by several colleagues in order to determine whether or not the themes that were
identified were accurate given the data provided by study participants. Peer examiners were
provided with a copy of key themes identified from participant transcripts as well as given access
to the transcripts in case they wished to review them. Finally, the use of multiple data collection
methods further increased study reliability (Merriam) and allowed for triangulation between the
data collected through participant interviews and from the review of relevant documents.

Another major issue of concern within qualitative research dealt with external validity, or
how transferable study results are to other situations, particularly because this form of research
studies samples which are selected through purposeful and non-random approaches. The
researcher was primarily responsible for providing the reader with in-depth analysis of a specific
situation or phenomenon so that applicability to other situations could be ascertained. However,
responsibility for deciding whether or not study results could be generalized to other similar
situations was generally left to the reader to determine (Merriam, 2002). In order to improve the
external validity of this study during data analysis, the researcher provided detailed description
of the information provided by program coordinators. This ensured that readers had enough
information to increase their comprehension of the process and methods used by these
professionals to design and assess learning outcomes for peer educators and to determine the
applicability of these findings to other relevant peer-related programs within higher education. In
addition, using multiple sites from which to gather information permitted the researcher to
further strengthen external validity by allowing for maximum diversity.

Perhaps the most important issue surrounding qualitative research concerned the
importance of strengthening study reliability, which addresses whether or not, given the data
collected, the results are dependable. This concern did not address the potential replication of
study results, as is the focus of quantitative research, but instead dealt with how consistent the
results are with the information provided by study participants (Merriam, 2002). The researcher used peer examination by several colleagues to determine whether or not study findings were consistent with the data which was collected and analyzed. Peer examiners were provided with a copy of study findings and asked to provide feedback on whether or not the results made sense. In addition, the researcher maintained an audit trail to fully explain the data collection and analysis process used throughout the course of the study as well as to provide documentation of any decisions made throughout this process. An audit trail was an ideal means for improving study reliability because it provided a documented record which explained all researcher decisions made during the course of the data collection and analysis process (Merriam, 2002).

Research Questions

The research questions (RQ) examined by this study were:

RQ1: Do program coordinators intentionally design and assess learning outcomes for peer educators?

RQ2: What types of learning outcomes are developed by program coordinators for peer educator training and how are the results from the assessment of these outcomes used to gauge peer educator performance throughout their term of service?

RQ3: What types of overall programmatic learning outcomes are developed by program coordinators for students who serve as peer educators?

RQ4: What specific methods are used by program coordinators to assess and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and determine whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved?
RQ5: How is the information gained from the assessment and measurement of learning outcomes for peer educators used by program coordinators in order to improve the peer education experience for peer educators?

Chapter Summary

Appropriate research protocols were followed during the entire data collection and analysis process. The results, which will be presented in chapter four, provided a greater understanding of the intentionality of program coordinators in designing and measuring learning outcomes for peer educators and explored the situational context surrounding this process. These results also offered an important glimpse into the specific process through which the information gathered from the assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators was used to evaluate peer educator performance and improve the experience of the students serving in these positions.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter provides the results from the study *An Exploration of Processes and Methods to Design and Assess Learning Outcomes for Peer Educators*. This study featured a basic interpretive qualitative methodology designed to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of program coordinators involved in designing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators. Research questions were constructed to examine the intentionality behind the development and assessment of learning outcomes as well as how the information gained from this process was used to improve the experience for peer educators. Of specific concern were the types of learning outcomes developed for peer educators and how these outcomes were used to gauge the overall performance of the peer educators. Special attention also was given to the types of learning outcomes tied to peer educator training and how the information gained from their assessment was used. Key themes emerged throughout the data collection and analysis process which provide an important context for the discussion of results related to each research question. Information is provided on participant demographics and themes which emerged throughout the course of data collection and analysis as well as how the themes related to the research questions for this study.

Participant Demographics

Participants for this research study (see Table 4.1) were 11 program coordinators at colleges and universities within the United States who direct peer education programs designed
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<td>2 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>First year of implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Private, 4-year</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Sheri</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2-3 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>5 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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to serve the needs of first-year students. The sample consisted of 10 females and one male. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 59. There were 10 Caucasians and one Hispanic who participated in this study. Three represented private institutions while eight represented public institutions. All of the participants worked at four-year colleges and universities. Three participants identified their professional status as administrators, two as faculty administrators, four as staff, one as faculty, and one as faculty/staff. None of the participants had served as program coordinators for more than five years with four participants having only coordinated a peer educator program for only one year. Five participants coordinated programs which reported to academic affairs and three participants coordinated programs which reported to student affairs/student life. Two participants stated that they coordinated programs with dual reporting structures (i.e. academic affairs and student affairs, enrollment management and academic affairs). One participant reported coordinating a program which reported to a division of student success. Eight of the participants had at least some general experience assessing learning outcomes while three had little to no experience. Two participants reported assessing learning outcomes for peer educators for five years, four participants stated that they had assessed outcomes for two to three years, and four participants remarked they had only assessed learning outcomes for one year. One participant also reported being in the initial stages of developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators with the initial implementation beginning during the Fall, 2007, semester.

Discussion of Key Themes

Eight themes emerged throughout the course of data collection and analysis. Three themes were clearly uncovered during the course of all 11 interviews. First, it was extremely apparent that program coordinators have high expectations for their peer educators and the
abilities they must have in order to effectively perform their responsibilities. Second, it was clearly evident that program coordinators could articulate their expectations for peer educator learning and development. This included articulating the knowledge and skills needed by peer educators in order to successfully perform their duties as well as the increased knowledge and competencies which program coordinators expected peer educators would gain through participation in their programs. Third, program coordinators largely used self-reflection as the predominant method for assessing the learning and development achieved by peer educators. The remaining five themes discussed in this section were constructed as the researcher carefully reviewed notes from each interview as well as interview transcripts in order to fully explain the commonalities which existed among 11 program coordinators who direct very different peer education programs and assessment efforts. All study themes were additionally reviewed and confirmed by peer examiners.

*High expectations for peer educators*

Program coordinators indicated that they have high expectations for peer educators which are tied to the abilities they believe the peer educators require in order to perform their position effectively. Program coordinators explained that when looking for students to serve as peer educators they largely desired high caliber students who performed well academically, who were involved on campus, and who had a genuine and intrinsic desire to help first-year students be successful, a fact which Wendi, a program coordinator at a four-year public university in the Midwest region, indicated during her interview:

*I guess we’re initially looking for somebody who, I guess, has a genuine caring for people. We treat them as professionals and we expect a lot out of them. So, we really, you know, want them coming in with a desire that they want to help people and that*
they’re doing this for more of a purpose…you know, we kind of look for…a work ethic...We look for them to be strong enough academically that they could take on a responsibility like this…and then, throughout the year, I guess our expectation is just basically that they’re helping, you know, get students involved on campus...they’re helping students, you know, remain students…that they’re really helping with that retention…that they’re helping the students be academically successful, connecting them to other campus resources…

Program coordinators also stated that they expected that the students they recruited and selected to be peer educators embody a level of maturity, have a strong work ethic, and serve as role models for successful, motivated students. Being good role models for students was an especially important issue for program coordinators, a fact emphasized by Sheri, a program coordinator at a four-year, public university in Mountain West region:

They also… I mean, more indirectly…are role models for the other students. I decided to recruit students who are…high caliber students intentionally because I kind of like to have students who have kind of figured it out and know what it takes to be good students and so they can kind of model this…for lack of a better term…appropriate student behavior to the other students…What kind of expectations do I have? Well, outside of the obvious…go to class, make sure that you’re on time, model good…good behavior…I also…I mean, I have pretty high expectations…for them in general. I mean, I expect them to take it seriously…to know that they really are influencing other students.

Program coordinators reported that their expectations of the students serving as peer educators involved having students who are highly self-motivated and who have certain knowledge and skills which are required in order to be effective in performing their roles and responsibilities, a
factor which program coordinators were easily able to articulate when asked to list these expectations for their peer educators.

*Expectations for learning easily articulated*

Program coordinators were easily able to articulate their expectations for peer educator learning and development. When asked about the knowledge and skills needed to be effective in peer educator roles, program coordinators responded that they expected the peer educators to be knowledgeable about the institution and campus resources, exhibit some leadership abilities, and have at least some level of competence in interpersonal communication skills, professional skills, role modeling, and ethical behaviors, a fact vocalized by Wendi:

…I mean, obviously, you know, that their academics are strong enough…that they’re able to handle, you know, being a student and being able to lead other students…we also look for, you know, leadership qualities. I mean, from the very first day of orientation, you know, they’re leading groups of students. They have to have, you know, good interpersonal skills…good communication…a very positive attitude. You know, we work as a team. They have to be able to do that…that they’re able to be professional. I mean, we can’t have them, you know, talking about inappropriate things with their students…ability to work with diverse populations…that they personally have strong time management and organization, because those are, you know, skills we’re trying to teach our students and it’s a lot easier if they at least have a basic framework of that…

All of the program coordinators who were interviewed could also easily articulate their expectations for what the peer educators were to learn by the end of their experience. Even though program coordinators were at different levels of efforts to develop and assess learning outcomes for peer educators, all of them had a firm concept for the learning and development
peer educators should experience as a result of their participation, a fact clearly communicated by John, a program coordinator at a four-year public university in the Mid-South region:

….we expect that they will be able to facilitate a small group of peers...that they will be able to build connections between...group members...that they will understand...professionalism and...gain a...stronger work ethic...that they will have a good solid knowledge base of Mid-South Public University and the resources that are available to first-year students and transfer students on our campus...that they are able to effectively communicate, not just in a business setting, but just interpersonally with their friends...with their family. They’ll be able to take skills that they learned here and get beyond just the job...what the job calls for and be able...to use the environment in which they...work currently...and definitely want them to know more about themselves. We want...some growth...some personal reflection...some...you know, working them towards self-actualization hopefully at some point...just put in situations that they wouldn’t normally put themselves in so that they learn how to react in different situations and different scenarios and...can respond professionally and knowledgeably about all of those...and we do a lot language training...in terms of what...what kind of words are appropriate...what is inclusive versus what is uninclusive...what might marginalize someone versus what really welcomes everyone to the table. So, that’s a big thing that...that we really hope that a lot of people walk away with...that language is...a big piece of how we communicate with others.

Even those program coordinators who had not focused as much attention on the learning experience for the peer educators as they had that of the first-year students could explain the knowledge and skills they anticipated their peer educators would gain from the experience, an
example of which was provided by Alicia, a program coordinator at a four-year private university in the Mountain West region, when asked to explain what she expected her peer educators would learn:

You know, I hadn’t…this past year, I really didn’t think about it from that perspective, and that’s one thing I’m going to change this year…I was focusing more on what I expected the first-year students to gain…and I just didn’t give a lot of time to the peer educators benefit…the learning outcomes for them. I focused more on learning outcomes for the undergraduate students. Now that I think about it…I think problem solving…would be very important because some of the students had to deal with some serious issues…how to negotiate self-harm protocols…not necessarily the University’s, even though that…that’s important, but also, you know, we have a QPR…there’s a QPR program out there called…“Question, Persuade, and Refer” for students who are thinking about self-harm…and I think it’s important…for them to be able to…feel confident and demonstrate the skills of QPR…Let’s see…conflict management, because…that has happened between groups…and how to deal with that…also…how to give positive feedback…I think those are some of the things…that I would like to add this year.

The ability of program coordinators to articulate both the knowledge and skills needed to be effective in peer educator positions as well as those abilities it is expected peer educators will gain as a result of their experiences indicated that program coordinators understood the potential developmental learning and growth which can occur for students who serve as peer educators in their programs.
Expectations for learning tied to professional skill development

Program coordinators indicated that their expectations for peer educator learning revolved around the development of professional skills. Program coordinators provided numerous examples of the types of knowledge and competencies needed by peer educators to successfully perform their roles and responsibilities. Important examples of skill sets included developing cultural sensitivity or appreciation for student differences and diversity; attaining competency in interpersonal communication skills; gaining leadership skills; improving organizational skills; practicing critical thinking and problem solving abilities; developing presentation skills; learning time management skills; practicing conflict management skills; understanding the importance of group dynamics and teamwork; and establishing a comprehension of appropriate role modeling and ethical behaviors associated with the role of being a peer educator. The level of competency needed in professional skill areas varied based on the specific institutional roles and responsibilities of the peer educators, but all program coordinators expected peer educators to have at least some level of competency in related professional skill areas in order to be able to serve in their programs, a fact emphasized by Diane, a program coordinator at a four-year public university in the Southeast region:

They have to be willing to get up in front of people…obviously…but…not necessarily be adept at public speaking yet. I mean, I think that’s something they can develop…they have to have good communication skills…you know, interpersonal types of communication skills. They need to be approachable for the students. They don’t need to seem that they are above them, so they have to have some humility…be willing to develop leadership skills. They should…like I said, I think the biggest is communication…good communication skills and some decent time…well very good
time management skills. They typically are very busy, so they have to be able to, you know, manage that time and balance it...and their own...they should have good personal management skills...managing their own lives fairly well...you know, just being able to balance...taking responsibility for their own actions...and, you know, have an internal locus of control type of thing...you know, have decent self-efficacy and just...they may have a lot going on but...they might be under some pressure at some times from different angles, so being able to manage that...pressure and being able to know when to say, “You know, I really can’t handle this right now,” and...that’s ok.

Program coordinators also provided numerous examples of professional skills which they anticipated peer educators would achieve during their term of service and many of these skill sets (i.e. organizational skills, time management skills, understanding role modeling and ethical issues) echoed the types of professional skills in which program coordinators expected the peer educators to already have achieved at least some basic competency in one form or another when selected to serve in their programs. However, almost all program coordinators verbalized that they hoped that their programs provided the peer educators with at least some form of developmental learning and growth which either amplified existing skill sets or added to the skills and competencies the peer educators already had, a factor explained by Wendi:

...like I said, you know, originally we screen for some of these qualities, but I think those same qualities we screen for, we really help expand on...I think they get really used to working, you know, in a professional role. They learn kind of what it means to be a professional...I think, you know, as far as like we look for, you know, that open mindedness and kind of those communication skills, but...specifically, we really hone on communication skills and...in a way, almost, you know, are training them...you know,
how to do open-ended questions, how to get people talking to you, how to get people to reveal…to kind of reveal things that are going on…how to sell yourself as a person…you know, so I think, skills that…you know, that they’re going to really use in their professional life…

Program coordinators referenced a wide variety of professional skills they desired peer educators to have and/or further develop throughout the course of their experiences. However, the developmental skills program coordinators mentioned most often as an expectation for peer educators to attain higher competency through their experiences were interpersonal communication skills and leadership skills. Program coordinators explained that being able to interact and communicate with others was crucial because it was one of the most important skills needed for peer educators to be effective in their roles. Peer educators were often expected to give presentations and be able to communicate effectively in a variety of settings, a factor which influenced further growth and development in this skill area. As a result, peer educators were expected to not only have some level of ability in this area when recruited but also further develop and improve their interpersonal communication skills through their responsibilities as explained by Heather, a program coordinator at a four-year, public university in the Southwest region:

We hope that they are able to…engage in public speaking without any…amount of frustration, nervousness, or stress that they could, you know, easily plan a workshop or a presentation for other adults. So…whether that’s, you know, a marketing pitch in a board room or, you know, a group of fifth grade science kids in their class, that…all that kind of stuff has been dispelled in them…they can pull…pull that sort of thing off…I think that we hope that they…learn some professional skills…So, we’re on them 24/7…and they
know that from the beginning…that if we don’t like the way they’re interacting with us at any point…whether that’s in class, verbally, on the phone, email, so whatever…that we’re going to let them know that kind of thing isn’t going to fly in the workplace…and we’re going to do that in a constructive way and just kind of check in with them and say, “Hey, heads up!”…and so, I think that’s an outcome…that they start to…get a little bit more of top of their professional communication…or adopting a more professional communication style.

Program coordinators also indicated that students who served as peer educators already had at least some level of leadership skills and experiences prior to being recruited and selected, particularly because these students were typically sophomores, juniors, and seniors who were involved on campus and already knew how to be successful in college. However, program coordinators expected that peer educators would gain additional leadership skills through role modeling and their interactions with fellow students, a fact explained by Leslie, a program coordinator at a four-year, public university in the Northeast region:

…generally, I expect that these are students who’ve had some leadership experiences in high school…whether it was, you know, captain of a team or president of a club…you know, that sort of thing…mostly because…that’s just been the kind of constant trend…you know, that they’ve all had some sort of leadership experience, you know, as…as part of their background and they’re kind of looking for more…other ways to get involved…you know, one thing too that…that comes out of it that…I can’t really say that I…had thought much about in the very beginning when we started pairing students up, but it certainly has…has played a huge role is…you know, the learning that occurs because they are in a close working relationship with another student…and then the two
of those students are in a working relationship with a faculty member…so…it’s, you know, how do you work with and relate to…a faculty member…how do you work with and relate to another person…and for some of these students who are used to kind of being the leaders and the…you know, the presidents, if you will, of everything…you know, it’s…it’s a real growth…growth experience to…actually share, you know…share leadership if you will…so, that’s certainly an element of it as well that I think they get in terms of their own skill development.

Program coordinators provide learning outcome statements

Interviews with program coordinators and a review of the documentation provided by them revealed that all but one of the program coordinators had detailed statements which could be considered as learning outcome statements for their peer educators. These statements offered intentions for peer educator learning and development and largely emphasized the knowledge and skill areas they were expected to gain as potential benefits of serving in peer educator programs. Program coordinators whose training was in the format of a course(s) in which the peer educators enrolled generally provided these outcome statements as course objectives on the syllabus. For example, a copy of the training course syllabus provided by Catherine, a program coordinator at four-year, private college in the West Coast region, listed course objectives tied to mentoring, the predominant role for her peer educators. Peer educators were required to be able to “Define leadership,” “Describe strategies for conflict management,” “List positive outcomes of effective communication,” and “Define and apply the concept of confidentiality.” In addition to training materials, learning outcome statements were also discovered on documents such as recruitment materials, position descriptions, and policies and procedures statements. In most cases, these learning outcome statements were generally stated in informal terms such as “The
successful [Peer Educator] develops interpersonal relationships with and between first-year students. In addition, [Peer Educators] will conduct themselves in a professional manner and model positive behavior consistent with the mission of the University, community life, and academic success,” an example which appeared on an agreement signed by the peer educators and Mary, a program coordinator at a four-year private university in the Northeast region. This excerpt from the agreement signed by peer educators served as an important example of the informal intentions for learning which were often provided by program coordinators. Perhaps the best example of a learning outcomes statement was provided by Diane as a formal listing of possible peer educator learning outcomes (i.e. “Know and exhibit traits and characteristics of a good role model.”) from which her peer educators could select outcomes on which to be assessed, a process which she explained:

I said I really need to make sure that the mentors are trained well…and also through conversations with mentors, some of them would say, “You know, it just wasn’t what I thought it was going to be” and I’m like, “Well, what did you think?” and that kind of got me talking to…to some of the leaders saying, “You know…I don’t…we don’t really know what mentors are expecting when they come into this experience, and I hate for them to leave disappointed because they didn’t feel like maybe they connected with their students well or maybe they didn’t feel utilized enough” and so then that…that led to better…trying to better to utilize mentors last year, and then this year, I thought well, let’s take it a step further and…and say, “Well, what…what do we think that…that they should gain out of it, and then what do they want to gain out it? Why are they even doing this…in the first place?” You know…and a lot of them…it’s because they want to give back or, you know, whatever, which is wonderful, but there has to be a little bit of
selfishness in there...you know, that you feel like you have to...you’re going to get something out of it, personally or professionally. So, that’s where we just kind of brainstormed...you know, what the leaders thought who had been through it every...you know, every semester for the past two years...some since it started...so, they said “These are things I think, you know, every mentor should get out of it” and then the mentors will pick three to five from the...that list I gave you...they’re going to need to identify for us...three to five learning outcomes that they want to gain out of, you know, being a mentor...and we just provided that list to help them. If they...if there’s something that is not on that list and I think it’s a viable, measurable outcome, then I’ll let them include that in there.

Only one program coordinator did not provide any documentation with a learning outcome statement. When asked about expectations for learning for the peer educators for this program, Sarah, a program coordinator at a four-year, public research university in the Southwest region, provided a context for the lack of stated learning outcomes:

    Not academic ones per se...it’s a retention program...and so...what we would like to achieve is for them to...be involved in the college and for them to...stay at the University and...and become teachers, etc....but as far as...we want them to learn...if they do learn...more things about being a mentor...that’s great, but that’s not the objective of the program...you know, it depends on how you’re defining, you know, learning outcomes. I mean, it’s not an academic program. Our objectives are sophomore retention, a program that serves the students...that they want to participate in...so we’re looking for indications that those are successful...so, we’re not assessing individual learning outcomes because it’s not the purpose of the program.
**Overall assessment of learning outcomes is an informal process**

Program coordinators indicated that the overall assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators is largely an informal process based predominantly on anecdotal information. As discussed on the preceding pages, program coordinators were able to articulate expectations for learning for peer educators and all but one had some form of learning outcome statements which indicated the learning and development which was expected to occur as a result of participation in their programs. However, program coordinators interviewed for this study remarked that informal anecdotal conversations they had with the peer educators served as the primary evidence for whether or not learning outcomes were achieved rather than established formal assessment measures (i.e. rating scales, pre-tests, post-tests) which could offer substantive evidence of whether or not peer educator learning and development actually occurred. Program coordinators also stated that additional means for ascertaining whether or not learning outcomes were achieved included how many students applied to be peer educators from year to year and whether or not previous peer educators returned for another year of service. The use of informal methods largely based on anecdotal evidence was described by Diane when she was asked about how she knew peer educators were affected by their experiences:

Really, it’s just…it’s mainly anecdotal. So, just conversations with the mentors and how many of them come back…you know if they want to do it again…we’re trying to get to where we have, you know, core group that return every year and so that would be part of it…if they came back…and wanted to do it again or if new people had said, “Well, I know this person who was a peer mentor and they just loved the experience so that’s why I want to do it…” or maybe they were in…the mentor’s class…that kind of thing…you know, I’ve had mentors just flat out say to me that, you know, this helped them…being a
mentor helped keep them in school...because they, you know...they didn’t want to be a hypocrite and tell their students to go get help...go do this...go do that...when they weren’t doing it themselves and it was kind of a wake up call for them...So, I’ve heard a lot of...several students say that too...that it just is a really good...experience for them. I mean, we had to turn people away this year, so...you know, the...program is...growing and I think the perception of being a mentor is growing more and more positive every year. So, I guess that’s how I am measuring it...the fact that...we actually had more applications than spots this year, which I think is good.

Some program coordinators also indicated that it was not just the anecdotal conversations which provided the evidence of peer educator learning and development but also through the long-lasting relationships they developed with their mentors, a good example of which was provided by Wendi:

I think we’re planting seeds and I don’t even know that...no matter how much evaluation we would do of their learning at this point, I don’t think they’ll really understand it or see it until they’re a few years down the road...I mean, that has been my experience too. I mean, my peer mentors as a whole...they keep coming back. Even some of the ones who I don’t think really got it at first, you know, come back now...and they’ll come back in three years and realize, you know, what a great opportunity this is and how much it did teach them about, you know, “the real world” and...being a professional and, you know, how they really gained these skills that other people didn’t have...I think our peer mentors themselves are even impressed or...some of them even realize...the uniqueness and the great opportunity...even the way we interview them. I mean, we have five people interview them...we really expect them to dress and I mean, we grill them pretty much
like we would a professional staff person…and, you know, a lot of people don’t have that opportunity and then, when they go to get a real job one day and they see, you know, the interview’s like that, they’re like, “Oh, yeah. This is easy…” and I think they’re a lot more prepared and I think once they start having those life experiences, they realize how much…I feel like the learning outcomes almost are most seem, you know, a year or so later…I had a peer mentor…he was one of my team leaders and, you know, he would question a lot of things, and now he’s in the corporate world and he’s, you know, a…kind of a manager of a pretty good business and he, you know, was talking about how much, you know, he learned and how we did this and how that taught him that and when he had this situation at work, he was able to respond and…I think we would get a lot of feedback that way, I guess…when we do try to give them probes and like even in our informal like, you know, discussion groups, and we try to ask them like, “You know, what have you gained?” you know, it’s always more…like interconnection and interpersonal skills that I feel like they usually identify and they don’t necessarily realize….the way they’re thinking has changed as much…but I feel like, you know, when I talk to them later there’s a lot more of the stuff that I think is more of the meat of what I feel like we’re giving them I guess.

Only two program coordinators mentioned that they had considered the possible creation of more formalized methods for measuring the overall learning and developmental gains achieved by peer educators as a result of participation in their programs, but neither of these coordinators had developed an actual method for measuring the benefits of the peer educator experience at the time this study was conducted, an additional sign of the largely informal nature of the assessment of peer educator learning and the lack of formal assessment approaches to examine it.
Lack of link between assessment of learning outcomes and peer educator training

One of the surprising themes which emerged during data collection and analysis was that program coordinators reported having done little to formally evaluate training for their peer educators. While some programs obviously reported having more developed and structured training methods than others, the predominant format of training provided information on the role of the peer educators, expectations of the peer educators, position relevant knowledge, institutional relevant knowledge, group dynamics and team building, and role modeling and ethical issues. However, only six of the program coordinators interviewed for this study actually had some form of learning outcomes which were tied to the training they provided to their peer educators, and five of these coordinators remarked that training was structured as a course(s) in which the peer educators enrolled with the actual learning outcomes being the course outcomes listed on the syllabus. Course-embedded assignments were the predominant method used to evaluate whether or not peer educators were experiencing learning and development during the training course and were mastering training content. However, there was little real evidence provided by program coordinators which indicated the intentional development of evaluative tools designed to examine the actual impact of training on peer educator learning and development, a point which was emphasized best by Heather:

…well, they’re enrolled in a class in spring…to…prepare them for teaching in the fall…spring is more about the training to get the job done…so, somewhat they’re assessed through the…specific criteria that’s laid out on the syllabus. So, they got lesson plans. They turned them in. They got feedback. Umm…they did a campus tour. They turned it in. They got feedback. They had to write a paper on the summer reading book. They got feedback. Umm…so they get that kind of continual loop…and you know, they
pass or fail the…the field work course…we recognize that there does need to be more than just a simple course evaluation…There’s a course evaluation on the instruction…but that won’t tell us much…those wonderful questions like “The instructor was prepared for class…” and that goes into my faculty, you know, portfolio, but…it won’t tell me anything about how…it will tell us very little about…training…

One program coordinator with a training course was still in the process of developing assessment methods but also stated that most likely the method used for evaluating the mastery of training content would be course-embedded assessment rather than an overall evaluation of the impact of training on peer educator learning. Those program coordinators who did not have a training course(s) reported conducting little formal assessment on the impact of training on peer educator learning and development and instead relied predominantly on informal anecdotal feedback to determine whether or not the content presented during training was mastered by the peer educators. Only one program coordinator actually reported intentionally initiating a formal assessment project to examine training for peer educators which included the development of a rubric and formal learning outcomes which could be measured, a process which John described:

…the assessment project that we did was on the orientation program assistant training. So, every spring what we do is we train them to select the first-year orientation guides, so that’s really what our focus is all spring, and so, they’re really responsible for recruiting…helping us recruit, selecting, and then training those individuals….they review…applications…the paper screening process. They facilitate group interviews…with a partner and then they also do one-on-one individual interviews with each…candidate throughout that process, and then also, as a part of that, they then also facilitate training day during the spring, where they take materials that we’ve prepared
and then do team building exercises with them…we also weren’t sure if we were training them effectively enough…So, that was essentially the start of the project…get data on the effectiveness of our spring training…Well, we…looked at spring training and we were like, “Well, what’s the point? What do…what do we do during spring training?” …and eventually our spring training sessions were set up to build relationships with…members of the orientation team. Then, we also trained on reading paper applications, facilitating group interviews, and doing one-on-one interviews…and I think that…one of things that was important for me was that we’re teaching them skills that go beyond just the…the task that we’re asking them to perform…but that we look at the bigger picture. What are we doing…what are we providing them that will be useful for them? And so we set down and we looked at…What are some areas that we…want to pay attention…to…because we heard when you’re filling out…a resume and a cover letter, these are things employers are going to look for and so…It wasn’t so much ask this question, write down the answer, give a rating…it was these…these broader skills and I think that’s what informed those learning outcomes that we came up with.

John’s use of a formalized process to examine whether or not peer educators mastered training content and learned from the training experience was the only formal assessment approach mentioned by program coordinators, a fact which largely indicated that formal assessment of the impact of training on peer educator learning and development has largely been ignored.

Use of self-reflection as the predominant assessment method

As previously discussed, program coordinators provided learning outcome statements which could be assessed but did little overall to develop formal assessment methods which substantively measured and provided evidence of whether or not peer educators actually
achieved competency in these outcomes. Program coordinators reported predominantly relying on self-reflection as the means of assessing the developmental growth and learning of the peer educators. Program coordinators who had courses which facilitated peer educator training largely used course-embedded self-reflective assignments tied to the course objectives to examine peer educator learning, a point which was emphasized by Leslie:

…the primary means of assessment in the past have been…you know, assignments I’ve given students to do…as part of the class that they’re taking with me…for example, you know, their…their midterm assignment in that class is…that they have to jointly write a paper on every student in their class…so it’s…one big paper but they have to at least write a paragraph on all of their students…you know, the…questions I’m generally asking them are “What have you learned about this student…in the…you know, six, seven weeks that you’ve got to know him or her…?” and “What do you think you can do to help this student in the remaining weeks you have in the semester…you know, really have a great experience at Northeast Public University?” So, what…happens is…it…really opens up the students…their eyes are sort of open…where…you know, at some point they realize “Wow, there’s like three or four students in this class that we just don’t know…you know, that none of us have really developed a relationship with…” and…so then they go out and make sure that they’re being planful about that…about spending time with, you know, these students or talking to them or IMing them, or…emailing them…you know, that sort of thing…and again…where the gaps are…it’s this startling, you know, sort of revelation to them…they’re required to do a check-in survey with their class…I give them a sample survey that I’ve used in my classes…you know, “What’s going well this semester in class?” “What’s not going well?” “What
would you like to see more of or less of?”…“Are there any topics you want us to cover?”…you know, that sort of thing…and then, they compile all the results and…write a paper for me about “Well, this is what we’re going to do now that we’ve read these results.” So, essentially what I’m trying to help them…to teach them…through this exercise is…you know, how do you some assessment of your own teaching and what’s going on in your own class and then alter your plans for the semester to meet the needs of your students?

Program coordinators who did not have these types of training courses often used self-reflective evaluation tools which they developed to gauge peer educator growth and performance and inform their training efforts, a fact emphasized by Laura, a program coordinator at a four-year public university in the Mountain West region, when discussing the use of her individual performance evaluation:

…at the end of each semester…we evaluate them on their performance and…we developed that…so that it would pretty much match…our job description…and so we…looked at all the different areas that our job description called for. We looked at professionalism, we looked at overall knowledge, and we looked at…their daily tasks…you know, like documentation and things like that…and again, I wanted it to be a growth tool more than anything else, and so that was the intent of the format, and actually, I asked them to…to actually evaluate themselves on each of these…on each of those areas and then we evaluate them and then we compare our own…our perspectives…those discussion areas…between me and the peer advisor…cause I want them…I want to know where they think they are in this growth period as well…I guess I would follow those as my learning outcomes. I wanted it to be a growth tool, so,
therefore, I thought...I wanted them to be able to reflect on how they felt they did over the year. I wanted it to be a self-reflective growth tool. So, ideally, I wanted them to reflect on their performance, and then also, I wanted them to be able to tell me...what they need...what do they want, and then I would be able to talk to them and say, “Here’s what I am observing and here’s some things I’d like for you to work on.” So, I really did want to avoid having it be a tool that...becomes like a test...so...that’s why I made...the ratings as an agree or a disagree...and there are sections down there for comments and goals. I really do...really just wanted it to be a self-reflective growth tool.

While self-reflective tools were often used to evaluate peer educator learning and development, program coordinators provided little evidence of formal assessment methods (i.e. rating scales, pre-tests, post-tests) used to evaluate learning and development. The predominant use of self-reflection rather than formal assessment approaches indicated that the assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators does not involve an intentional process. However, program coordinators reported using the information gained from self-reflective tools to improve the peer educator experience.

*Information to improve the peer educator experience*

Program coordinators consistently reported using the information gained from the self-reflective tools which they developed to better understand the learning and development experienced by peer educators and indicated that they used this information to modify and improve the peer educator experience. The self-reflection provided by the peer educators was most prevalently used to gauge the effectiveness of training efforts while gathering information which could be used to revise current learning objectives and inform future peer educator training in order to make it more effective for the peer educators. Program coordinators indicated
that this form of assessment allowed them to understand how much content peer educators
retained from training as well as the issues on which peer educators needed additional training, a
fact best explained by Laura:

We do…reflect on our training and, you know…did we do what we intended to
do…because every other week, we meet with our peer advisors on a one-on-one basis,
and at that point…we talk about…their meetings with the students. We do some on-going
training during that time looking at advising strategies. We are able to assess whether the
things that we have trained them on…did they pick it up correctly, or do we need to make
some adjustments? So, even during the…semester, we’re…meeting with the peer
advisors every other week to assess how they’re doing. So, I guess that’s how we assess
how…whether our training is…effective or not…so they know they have to meet with
us…and then that also tells us what we need to focus on sometimes during a staff
meeting…if we’re seeing a trend…amongst the peer advisors…something that…that
needs to be worked on as a group…what it helps us to do is every year…it helps us to
redefine our training…it helps us to…reevaluate where we are…with our…staff, so
it’s…a reflection piece for us…to be able to…to enable us to know where we are…with
what we have to do with our peer staff.

However, despite using this information to understand whether or not training content was
mastered and improve existing training efforts, program coordinators provided little evidence
that they intentionally sought to evaluate the impact of training on the peer educators and instead
used this information when reflecting back on their efforts. Program coordinators also stated that
the information which they gained through this process would be used to provide feedback to
peer educators on issues related to their performance and to provide them with developmental
guidance during their term of service, a point which was emphasized by Wendi:

…I think that it kind of gets them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and has,
you know, them be able to make improvements in both areas and, you know, kind of
gives them more self-confidence in their work by, you know, evaluating them and then
also, like I said, they can grow upon their strengths, and then also, like I said, from a
programming perspective, if I see areas where all of the peer mentors are struggling then
I know…Sometimes, we need to do re-education in certain areas…so I think it makes it
better for them…you know, we use the evaluation as a way to find out what they need
and respond to that.

Some program coordinators also indicated that the information gained from self-
reflective assessment tools would assist them with making better recruitment and selection
decisions in the future, particularly related to the rehiring of peer educators from previous years,
as referenced by Diane:

It’s going to help better improve the training of the mentors which obviously is lacking
now…and the selection and recruitment of the mentors…and then also, you know, see if
we can tie it to the overall perception of the course. You know…if I focus on developing
better mentors, then does that in turn translate into a more supportive and dynamic…you
know, Southeast Public University 1000 class…and, if so, is that then in turn helping us
retain or support new students better…

A few program coordinators also indicated that the information they gathered from the
development and assessment of learning outcomes was shared with key campus constituents (i.e.
faculty and administrators) as a means of validating the use of a peer educator program on their
specific campuses, but there was not enough saturation of the data to indicate that this was a common theme among all the program coordinators.

Chapter Summary

The key themes which emerged from data collection and analysis provided an interesting picture of the current efforts used by program coordinators to develop and assess learning outcomes for peer educators. Program coordinators presented high expectations for their peer educators and could clearly articulate the overall learning and development peer educators were expected to gain during their term of service. These expectations, which were often related to professional skill development, were reflected in the formal and informal learning outcome statements provided by program coordinators and discovered on the documentation which they provided. However, despite the existence of learning outcome statements, interviews with program coordinators revealed that the actual assessment of learning outcomes was largely an informal process which predominantly relied on anecdotal evidence rather than formal assessment methods which could actually measure peer educator learning and development and provide substantive evidence of whether or not outcomes were achieved. While some program coordinators had learning outcomes which are loosely tied to peer educator training, there was little evidence provided by program coordinators of the formalized assessment of peer educator training and its impact on peer educator learning. Self-reflection was the predominant method used by program coordinators to determine whether or not learning outcomes were achieved, a factor which only further emphasized the largely informal assessment approach used to provide evidence of peer educator learning and development. However, program coordinators indicated that the information gained from self-reflective assessment tools was used to improve peer
educator training as well as make the experience more developmentally beneficial for the peer educators.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Research Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the specific process through which peer education program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and to discover how the information gathered through this process is used to evaluate peer educator performance, determine whether or not the designated learning outcomes have been achieved, and improve the peer education experience for the peer educators. This study was concerned with whether or not program coordinators intentionally design and assess learning outcomes for peer educators. Of particular interest were the types of learning outcomes developed by program coordinators for peer educator training and how the results from the assessment of these outcomes are used to gauge peer educator performance throughout their term of service. The researcher was also interested in the types of overall programmatic learning outcomes developed by program coordinators for students who serve as peer educators as well as the specific methods used by program coordinators to assess and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and determine whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved. A major goal of the study also was to understand the manner in which the information gained from the assessment and measurement of learning outcomes for peer educators is used by program coordinators in order to improve the peer education experience for peer educators.

This chapter provides a discussion of study results, particularly as they relate to the research literature. Potential limitations of the data are also discussed in order to provide the
reader with a context for applying study results to their own situations. Implications and recommendations are offered in order to assist program coordinators with future efforts to intentionally design peer education programs which provide peer educators with opportunities for learning and developmental growth. Specific recommendations focus on providing program coordinators with a context for designing learning outcomes and constructing formal assessment processes to gather evidence that outcomes have or have not been achieved. Finally, potential areas for future research are discussed.

Discussion of Study Results

*RQ1: Do program coordinators intentionally design and assess learning outcomes for peer educators?*

Program coordinators have high expectations for the students who serve as peer educators in their programs, a factor which is directly related to the type of high achieving students which they recruit into these positions. They are consistently able to specify the knowledge and skills needed by students serving as peer educators in order to successfully perform the various roles and responsibilities which are associated with their positions. Program coordinators are also easily able to articulate their expectations for the learning and development peer educators should experience through participation in their programs. The primary theoretical construct behind the use of peer educators is that they have a substantial influence on the actions and behaviors of their fellow students (Klein, Sondag, & Drolet, 1994) which can ultimately affect student retention and persistence (Astin, 1996; Bean, 1985; Grant-Valone & Ensher, 2000; Tinto, 1975). Because of the significant potential positive and negative influence students can have on their peers, particularly those peers who are first-year students, it is not surprising that program coordinators have high expectations for peer educators as well as a concept of the specific
knowledge and level of competence which they are required to have in order to successfully serve in their programs. A significant amount of research literature also offers substantial evidence that peer educators benefit and learn from their experiences and are significantly changed by them (Badura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart, & Bartoloemi, 2003; Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000; Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Harmon, 2006; Holland & Huba, 1989; Jones & Kolko, 2002; Micari, Streitwieser, & Light, 2006; McKinney & Reynolds, 2002; Rice & Brown, 1990; Sawyer, Pinciaro, & Bedwell, 1997; Puchkoff & Font-Padron, 1990; Tenny & Houck; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier). The ability of program coordinators to easily articulate the expectations they have for peer educator learning and development indicates that they do understand the potential benefits and impact their programs may have on the peer educators. However, while this finding may be supported by the evidence provided by program coordinators, this study was predominantly concerned with whether or not they actually understood this issue to such a degree that they intentionally initiated a process to develop and assess learning outcomes for the peer educators serving in their programs.

The development of learning outcomes assists professionals with articulating the intentions they have for what students are to learn through participation in programs and services (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Program coordinators present evidence of the existence of formal and informal learning outcome statements on various forms of documentation, such as training course syllabi, recruitment materials, and position descriptions. The existence of these learning outcome statements offer at least some indication of the intentions program coordinators have for peer educator learning and development, a finding which supports the existing research literature (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson; Palomba & Banta) calling for professionals to indicate in writing their intentions for the developmental benefits of their programs. This finding also echoes a
suggestion (Maki, 2004) for development of learning outcome statements at programmatic levels
to offer designated parameters for student learning and development. The existence of learning
outcome statements on program documentation serves as further evidence that program
coordinators recognize the potential benefits their programs may have on the peer educators and
have provided formal and informal statements which describe the anticipated parameters for the
knowledge and skills which will be gained from the experience. However, while the existence of
learning outcome statements offers evidence that program coordinators have at least some
concept of the potential developmental learning and growth which peer educators may
experience as a result of participation in their programs, these statements do not meet the
operational definition for learning outcomes which was adopted for this study and provide little
indication of intentional efforts to formally assess their achievement.

In chapter one of this study, the researcher operationally defines learning outcomes as
detailed statements based on established programmatic goals and objectives which give an
indication of the knowledge and competencies students are expected to attain from participation
in a particular program. This operational definition includes the contention that substantive
learning outcomes also are measurable in the sense that an individual must actually be able to
identify or observe a means for knowing whether or not the expected outcomes were achieved
through participation in a program (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004). The formal assessment
of learning outcomes provides actual evidence which indicates whether or not the expected
outcomes are achieved. It also serves as an indicator of the degree to which those who
participated in the program mastered the knowledge and skills in which they were expected to
achieve competency (Bresciani, 2003). As previously discussed in this section, program
coordinators are able to easily articulate their expectations for peer educator learning and
development and offer formal and informal learning outcome statements which provide a context for the potential overall gains peer educators will experience by participating in their programs. Unfortunately, program coordinators do not provide any evidence that they really have intentionally written learning outcome statements with any thought as to how they would formally measure or observe whether or not the outcomes were achieved and learning and development actually occurred. This finding is contrary to the operational definition of learning outcomes which was adopted by the researcher for this study and indicates a lack of intentionality by program coordinators with developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators.

It is extremely important for program coordinators to establish a formal and comprehensive means for assessing the developmental gains of peer educators in order to more fully understand the specific components of the peer education experience which lead to learning and growth (Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2005; Dye & Robinson, 2005; McKinney & Reynolds, 2002). The establishment of “well-designed outcome assessments of peer-provided programs” (Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000, p. 477) is recommended because it provides a context for what all of the students involved in the program, including the peer educators, are expected to learn from it (Bentley, Cradit, & Jackson, 2006; Sawyer, Pinciaro, & Bedwell; Tenney & Houck). The formal of assessment of learning outcomes is suggested in order to understand how peer educators are changed by their experiences and whether or not specific outcomes were achieved (Delworth, Sherwood, & Cassaburi, 1974). However, analysis of the data obtained during the course of this study reveals that while program coordinators can easily articulate their expectations for peer educator learning and development, they have done very little to intentionally develop formal assessment methods which examine the overall learning and
development of the peer educators and provide evidence of whether or not peer educators have truly mastered the knowledge and skills which program coordinators indicated the peer educators are expected to gain from service in their programs. Instead of establishing formalized measures to document and analyze the overall learning gains achieved by the peer educators and provide evidence of whether or not the expected learning outcomes are obtained, program coordinators rely predominantly on informal, anecdotal evidence such as personal conversations and prolonged interactions with peer educators. Program coordinators consistently remark that anecdotal evidence serves as the primary indicator of whether or not learning outcomes are achieved. This suggests that while program coordinators may have stated that they have begun a process to develop and assess learning outcomes for peer educators, the actual development and measurement of learning outcomes is not an intentional process as program coordinators have not intentionally designed learning outcomes through which learning and development can be substantively measured.

RQ2: What types of learning outcomes are developed by program coordinators for peer educator training and how are the results from the assessment of these outcomes used to gauge peer educator performance throughout their term of service?

It is important for program coordinators to focus efforts on developing and measuring learning outcomes related to peer educator training in order to understand comprehensively the impact training has on the learning and development of peer educators (Lindsey, 1997; Russel & Skinkle, 1990). While program coordinators explain that they often use the information they gather from the informal assessment of learning outcomes to modify or improve their training for the peer educators, there is little evidence to provide a substantial linkage between the formal assessment of learning outcomes and peer educator training. The vast majority of program
coordinators who participated in this study indicate that they lack any formal evaluation of the impact of their training on the peer educators, a finding which is contrary to the recommendation of a continuous evaluation of peer educator training as a means for ensuring that peer educators have mastered the content they are expected to know to successfully perform their duties (Keeling & Engstrom, 1993). While learning outcome statements exist for the overall experience, very few outcomes are designated specifically for peer educator training. A few program coordinators who have an established training course(s) for their peer educators state that the development and assessment of learning outcomes is directly tied to the learning objectives listed on the syllabus with these outcomes evaluated by the assignments embedded within the course(s). However, in most situations where this is the case, program coordinators also indicate that these outcomes listed on course syllabi actually serve as their overall learning outcomes for peer educators rather than specific outcomes tied directly to training efforts. These program coordinators also vocalize a need for a more formalized evaluation of their training in order to fully gauge its impact on their peer educators. Program coordinators without training courses offer little evidence of the formal assessment of training and rely predominantly on anecdotal evidence to determine whether or not it affected peer educator learning and development. It should also be noted that only one of the 11 program coordinators who were interviewed for this study actually has intentionally begun a formal assessment process to develop and measure learning outcomes tied to the knowledge and skills peer educators are expected to achieve from training. This serves as a further indication that the program coordinators in this study have largely ignored a major area for evaluating the developmental learning experienced by the peer educators in their programs and have not done enough to formally assess the impact of training on peer educator learning and development.
RQ3: *What types of overall programmatic learning outcomes are developed by program coordinators for students who serve as peer educators?*

One of the important discoveries of this research study is that program coordinators’ expectations for learning are directly related to either the development of new or improvement of existing professional skills for the peer educators. The formal and informal learning outcome statements discussed during interviews with program coordinators and discovered on program documentation, such as training course syllabi, recruitment materials, and position descriptions, also provide intentions for peer educator learning and development which are tied increasing competency in professional skill areas. Program coordinators specify that professional skill development includes gaining knowledge or achieving some level of competence in areas related to multiculturalism and diversity, interpersonal communication skills, leadership abilities, organizational planning, critical thinking, time management, conflict resolution, group processing skills, role modeling, and appropriate ethical behaviors. Program coordinators expect peer educators to have at least some degree of competency in professional skill sets when they are recruited and selected with the exact level of competency in these skill areas tied to the specific institutional role and responsibilities of their peer educators. They also expect peer educators to further develop competencies in these professional skill sets during their term of service. The development of increased competency in interpersonal communication skills and leadership skills are the two professional skill sets mentioned most often by program coordinators as crucial for peer educators to achieve in order to successfully perform their responsibilities and effectively provide guidance and support to first-year students. The numerous references to various professional skill sets provided by program coordinators during this study support the recommendations found within the research literature for the knowledge
and competencies peer educators are expected to have in order to be successful in their positions (Ender & McFadden, 1980; Ender & Newton, 2000; Russel & Skinkle, 1990).

**RQ4: What specific methods are used by program coordinators to assess and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and determine whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved?**

Program coordinators indicate that self-reflective methods, such as course-embedded assignments or some form of self-reflective tool which they design, serve as the primary means through which they assess peer educator learning and development and gauge peer educator performance. Program coordinators with training courses often use course-embedded self-reflective assignments which are related to course objectives while those program coordinators without training courses develop their own self-reflective tools which they use to evaluate peer educator growth and performance and inform future training efforts. The research literature indicates that the usage of methods and tools involving self-reflection by peer educators is extremely important because it provides a unique learning process for peer educators (Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2005; Dye & Robinson, 2005; Harmon, 2006; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2004). Self-reflection allows peer educators to reflect immediately on the learning and growth they have experienced, to successfully internalize it, and to apply what they have learned to personal behaviors and career related decisions (Harmon; Micari, Streitwieser, & Light; Puchkoff & Font-Padron, 1990; Tenny & Houck; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier).

The use of self-reflective methods by program coordinators reveals that they desire their peer educators to understand and evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses while recognizing where learning and growth are actually occurring and where improvement is needed. The use of self-reflective tools also is important because it actually involves the students serving as peer
educators in the assessment process where they complete some form of self-assessment. This allows the peer educators to provide their own perspectives on their learning and development as a part of the assessment process. The predominant use of self-reflection as an assessment method also supports an important recommendation that students should be involved in the assessment process, particularly through the use of self-assessment tools following participation in a specific program to allow students to reflect on their personal experiences and the growth they have achieved as a direct result of those experiences (Skipper, 2005). However, the majority of program coordinators in this study state that they have not created formal assessment methods (i.e. ratings scales, pre-tests, post-tests) which provide substantive evidence of peer educator learning and development. In fact, only one of the 11 program coordinators even mentioned the implementation of a formal assessment process using formal measures such as a rubric on which peer educator learning could be measured and this process was specifically focused on peer educator training, not the overall assessment of learning outcomes for the peer educators. The lack of formal assessment measures only further indicates the largely unintentional nature of developing and assessing learning outcomes for the peer educators.

**RQ5: How is the information gained from the assessment and measurement of learning outcomes for peer educators used by program coordinators in order to improve the peer education experience for peer educators?**

Despite a mostly informal means for assessing learning outcomes for the peer educators, program coordinators state that the information which they do gain through self-reflective assessment tools is actually used to improve the experience for the peer educators. This is important because it supports assertions found within the research literature which indicate that true assessment not only involves determining whether or not outcomes are achieved but also
using the information gained through the assessment process to improve the quality of programs and services (Halpern, 1987; Palomba & Banta, 1999). The information gained from self-reflective tools allows program coordinators to understand whether or not peer educators retain the knowledge and skills they learn during peer educator training. Information gained from assessment allows program coordinators to ascertain whether or not training is effective for the peer educators as well as the level of competency peer educators achieve through the retaining of information from training. Significant knowledge gaps revealed by assessment results are used by program coordinators to inform future training efforts. This finding supports the strategic planning model advocated by Keeling and Engstrom (1993) that information gained from assessment of peer educator programs be used to “sense, monitor, and react to change” (p. 259) as a means of identifying issues which require immediate attention in order to improve the experience for peer educators.

Self-reflective assessment methods also provide program coordinators with valuable information which they can use to improve future recruitment and selection decisions, particularly those related to the hiring and rehiring of peer educators who desire to return for another year of service. Ender (1983) has recommended that peer educators be individually evaluated through developmental interviews where the personal and professional development of the peer educators is a primary concern. These interviews involve the establishment of developmental goals for peer educators as well as feature professionals assisting peer educators with assessment of their abilities to achieve the goals which are created and identifying opportunities which will further facilitate learning and growth. While not directly tied to the process suggested by Ender, study results reveal that program coordinators do use the information gained from assessment in a way which supports the overall intent of how he
suggests the information should be applied in order to encourage learning and development of the peer educators. Program coordinators use the information gained from self-reflective assessments to provide peer educators with important developmental feedback which emphasizes the learning and development which has already occurred. Program coordinators also use this information to offer insight into peer educators’ individual strengths while giving important guidance for improving performance in knowledge and skill areas where competency is lacking. In addition, one program coordinator actually discusses conducting a process extremely similar to the one recommended by Ender, a discovery which further indicates that program coordinators are knowledgeable about how to adapt the information gained from these assessments to help peer educators recognize and improve upon their own developmental learning and growth.

Research Assumptions

The researcher entered this study with several basic assumptions regarding the development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators. First, it was assumed that program coordinators did not intentionally engage in a process of establishing and measuring learning outcomes for peer educators, particularly because they were more concerned with the outcomes attained by the first-year students whom their programs were designed to assist. It was also assumed that any assessment process which had been initiated was the result of unintentional efforts by program coordinators. As a result, it was assumed that specific learning outcomes for peer educators either did not exist or were not easily identifiable or articulated. It was also assumed that any learning outcomes which did exist would not be sufficiently assessed or measured by program coordinators. Finally, the researcher assumed that if learning outcomes were, in one form or another, being developed and assessed, program coordinators were doing
very little to actually use the information gained from them to improve the experience for the peer educators.

The evidence provided by this interpretive qualitative study reveals that the assumption regarding intentionality behind the development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators is fairly accurate. Program coordinators offer intentions for peer educator learning in the formal and informal learning outcome statements which they provide and some of these statements are detailed enough to be measured if formal assessments were actually designed to gauge their achievement. However, program coordinators consistently indicate that they do not intentionally develop learning outcomes for peer educators with any thought as to how to design formal assessment methods which actually examine and measure whether or not these learning outcomes are achieved. As a result, they have largely created learning outcome statements which they have no real concept of how to measure or assess and lack the formal assessment methods which could provide the evidence that the expected outcomes are actually achieved. Program coordinators rely predominantly on informal assessment methods which provide anecdotal information rather than a formal assessment process that offers substantive evidence that learning and developmental growth has occurred and that peer educators have achieved increased competency in the knowledge and skills along which program coordinators expect growth. As a result, it is fairly evident that program coordinators have not intentionally designed learning outcomes or considered how to formally assess them.

Based on the findings of this study, it is hard to say whether the second assumption related to the intentionality of formal assessment processes is accurate or not. One program coordinator states that he has intentionally begun a process to develop learning outcomes for peer educator training and a rubric by which these outcomes could be assessed. Several other program
coordinators also mention that they have at least considered developing more formal measures to assess learning, but none of them have implemented their ideas at this time. This suggests that when formal assessment of peer educator learning and development actually occurs, it may be as a direct result of the intentional efforts of program coordinators. However, the findings of this study do not provide enough evidence to substantiate this claim.

The assumption that specific learning outcomes are virtually non-existent is inaccurate as program coordinators not only easily articulate their expectations for peer educator learning and development but also provide numerous examples of formal and informal learning outcome statements for the peer educators on various programmatic documents. However, as already discussed, these learning outcome statements are not developed with any thought as to how they could formally be measured, which is contrary to the operational definition of learning outcomes which was adopted for this study. Unfortunately, the assumption regarding a lack of sufficient assessment methods used by program coordinators to measure learning outcomes is proven largely accurate. While the use of self-reflection as an assessment methodology is important, program coordinators have developed little formalized methods to sufficiently assess the knowledge and development achieved by peer educators and provide evidence that learning outcomes have been obtained. The lack of a more formalized means for evaluating the impact peer educator training has on peer educator learning and development is particularly disturbing given the important role training has in preparing students to serve as peer educators. These findings provide further indication of a lack of intentionality in developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators. However, despite this trend, it is encouraging to learn that the assumption that program coordinators are doing little to actually use the information gained from the assessment of learning outcomes is not accurate. Regardless of their approaches and the
lack of formal assessment measures, nearly all of the program coordinators use the information gained from self-reflective tools to actually improve the experience for their peer educators.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This study was designed to address the significant lack of literature dealing with the development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators. While this study provides some important implications for program coordinators of peer education programs, there are a few limitations which must first be acknowledged and addressed.

Because this study was conducted using a qualitative methodology and the participants in this study do not compose a random sample of program coordinators, the results are not generalizable in the statistical sense. The researcher made the decision that only program coordinators who directed programs which featured peer educators providing guidance and support to first-year students were included in this study. As a result, the findings of this study may not be applicable to peer education programs serving students beyond the first year of college. Program coordinators self-selected themselves for participation in this study as all of them indicated that they had begun a process to develop and assess learning outcomes for peer educators, one of the research protocols for this study. Study participants perceived that they had initiated an assessment process which examined peer educator learning and development. However, given the findings of this study, it was possible that this perception may serve as a limitation of study results because program coordinators have largely not initiated an actual formal assessment process but have instead relied on informal methods and anecdotal evidence. Program coordinators also were at various different levels of approaches to develop and assess learning outcomes, a factor which may have affected study results.
The lack of a more diverse sample of participants might be considered as a limitation for this study. None of the program coordinators who were interviewed had been in their position longer than five years or and most indicated that they had only recently begun to initiate some type of process to develop and assess learning outcomes within the past two to three years, a factor which could have potentially affected the results of this study. Participants only represented program coordinators who worked at four-year institutions, so it is possible that study results may not be applicable to individuals working at two-year colleges or universities.

All of the data collected in this study was gathered via phone interviews with study participants. In qualitative research, it is ideal for the researcher to have one-on-one interactions with study participants and notice important non-verbal cues which may emphasize important issues related to participants’ feelings about the subject being discussed. However, limited financial resources prohibited the researcher from traveling to the participants’ institutions as all of the participants worked at colleges or universities more than a five hour drive from the researcher’s institution. As a result, the researcher was unable to be in the same environment as the participant, which may be viewed as a limitation of this qualitative study. Document analysis was used as an additional data collection method. While all participants had to agree to provide the researcher with any important documents which could assist with developing a detailed understanding of the situational context surrounding the process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators, participants self-selected the documents which they provided to the researcher. As a result, it was possible that additional forms of valuable documentation, which may not have been perceived as important by participants, may have been excluded from review.
A final potential limitation of this study dealt with analysis of the data. The use of multi-campus sites is typically viewed as advantageous for improving study validity in qualitative research. However, the use of participants who represented a wide variety of programs and efforts to assess learning outcomes for peer educators provided more complexity than the researcher had originally anticipated as use of the constant comparative method during data collection and analysis did not immediately reveal a saturation of the data for every theme discovered by the researcher. While three key themes emerged immediately, additional themes were constructed and confirmed only after the researcher carefully reviewed interview notes and transcripts. Important themes uncovered from a review of these materials allowed the researcher to fully describe and make sense of all existing themes and categories which addressed the research questions of this study.

As stated previously, this study has some important implications for program coordinators of peer education programs. Peer educators are being used in a wide variety of positions and roles (i.e. orientation leaders, peer advisors, peer mentors) designed to assist first-year students with successfully transitioning to college. While these programs are established to support the needs of first-year students, significant attention has been given to the fact that the peer educators experience developmental learning and growth during their experiences of providing guidance and support to these students. The results of this study reveal that program coordinators at least understand the potential learning and growth which their programs may have on the students serving as peer educators. This is particularly important because it clearly indicates the recognition by program coordinators that their programs are developmentally beneficial for all of the students participating in them, not just those students that they were originally designed to serve. This is not surprising given the fact that program coordinators
represent campus faculty and staff who obviously care about students on their campuses and recognize the potential power of positive peer influence to such a degree that they have developed and serve as advocates for programs that feature peer educators in pivotal support roles which are designed to assist first-year college students. However, while the results of this study reveal that program coordinators may understand the potential for learning and growth which can occur for the peer educators in their programs, they need to give more attention to the intentional development of formal assessment processes and tools which can help them to actually measure and document this learning and growth.

The results of this study indicate that program coordinators provide their intentions for the learning and development which peer educators should experience by participating in their programs. The very existence of formal and informal learning outcome statements serves as documented proof that intentions for learning exist. However, the results of this study also reveal that program coordinators have not intentionally developed learning outcomes with any thought as to the formal assessment measures which can provide the evidence of whether or not outcomes are actually achieved. Program coordinators can easily articulate the learning and development peer educators are to experience but when asked about the type of evidence on which they rely for proof of this achievement they simply remark that it is predominantly through informal, anecdotal evidence rather than substantive evidence provided by formal assessment measures. This is extremely surprising, particularly given the fact that all of the program coordinators who were interviewed indicated that they had begun a process to develop and assess learning outcomes for peer educators.

The important implication of this study is that program coordinators should not only intentionally develop detailed learning outcomes but must also ensure that they are measurable
so that they can gain substantive evidence of whether or not the anticipated knowledge and skills were actually gained through participation in their programs. They must intentionally consider how they will actually measure learning outcomes and obtain the necessary evidence to really know whether or not the objectives they have for the peer educators were actually achieved. If program coordinators truly expect their peer educators to develop knowledge and skills in professional competencies, such as role modeling, ethical issues, conflict resolution, and interpersonal communication, then they must not only just create learning outcome statements but must also consider formal assessment measures which can determine whether or not learning and growth actually occurs in each of these expected skill areas. Program coordinators also rely too heavily on anecdotal information to provide the definitive evidence of whether or not outcomes are achieved and have not concretely thought about how to more substantively measure and document the learning and growth which occurs. This implies that while program coordinators may believe in and value the developmental benefits their programs provide to peer educators, they really lack the necessary evidence to substantiate their claims that actual learning and growth really has occurred.

Program coordinators obviously understand the importance of using self-reflection as a method for assessing the learning and developmental gains achieved by peer educators. This is very important because it provides an opportunity for peer educators to be personally involved in the assessment process and offer their own personal perspectives on what they feel they have learned and gained from their participation in the program. However, because of the largely anecdotal information provided by this type of approach, program coordinators need to more fully develop additional methods for measuring learning and growth. They should develop effective assessment tools which feature multiple methods for assessing learning and growth and
include a section of self-reflection so that the personal experiences of the peer educators are not lost.

The results of this study also provide an important implication regarding peer educator training. Program coordinators need to intentionally consider the development and formal assessment of learning outcomes for peer educator training. Program coordinators indicate that training is a vitally important piece of peer education programs because it provides peer educators with knowledge and expectations which are directly related to their ability to successfully perform their duties. However, they offer few learning outcomes specifically tied to training efforts and have not considered how to formally assess and measure outcomes to fully gauge the impact of training. Regardless of whether or not they have developed programs where peer educators are paid or where they serve as volunteers, program coordinators must do more to provide indications of the expectations they have for what the peer educators are to learn from training and should develop learning outcomes which are specifically tied to training efforts.

Regardless of the format of their training program (i.e. courses, workshops), all program coordinators must develop evaluation tools which comprehensively assess whether or not the peer educators mastered the content provided during training. Those program coordinators who have training course(s) must not rely too heavily on course-embedded assessment as the predominant approach for examining mastery of training content but should find an appropriate balance between the necessary amount of course-embedded assessment and a formal evaluation of the impact of training on peer educator learning and development. Understanding the impact of the knowledge and skills peer educators gain from training could also assist program coordinators with gauging peer educator performance and address content areas where competency was not mastered during the initial training. The assessment of learning outcomes
tied to peer educator training will not only provide program coordinators with better information to improve their training efforts but also offer peer educators the opportunity to more effectively evaluate what they learned through training and pinpoint areas where further training is required.

Program coordinators have obviously put a lot of time and energy into creating peer educator programs which support the learning and developmental needs of the first-year students that their programs were designed to serve. However, program coordinators obviously have not given as much thought to supporting the learning and developmental needs of the peer educators who serve in their programs. Program coordinators may recognize the potential for their programs to offer peer educators extremely beneficial opportunities for learning and growth, but this simple recognition is not enough to really affect a significant amount of developmental change within the peer educators. If program coordinators truly are advocates for student learning and growth, they must do a better job of developing programs which feature intentional opportunities for learning and growth for all students involved in the program, including the peer educators. The intentional development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators can provide program coordinators with the means for indicating their intentions for peer educator learning and development. Establishing formal assessment methods which offer evidence of whether or not these outcomes are achieved will also allow program coordinators to better understand the way in which peer educators achieve competency in knowledge and skill areas where development is expected. It can also provide program coordinators with important information which they can use to gauge peer educator performance and offer them additional developmental feedback designed to help them meet individual learning goals and objectives.

Based on the results of this study, this researcher recommends that program coordinators give more serious consideration to intentionally establishing a process of developing and
assessing learning outcomes for peer educators. This process should first involve the creation of a list of overall learning outcome statements for peer educators which would explicitly state the knowledge and skill areas in which peer educators are expected to achieve competency. For example, there are many areas related to professional ethics (i.e. not drinking with their students, not dating a fellow student, practicing confidentiality) where program coordinators expect their peer educators to experience learning and development. Therefore, a good example of a learning outcome statement may be “The peer educator will develop an understanding of the ethical issues related to mentoring undergraduate first-year students.” Program coordinators could also create a listing of areas of competency (i.e. critical thinking skills, group decision making, leadership, oral communication, time management) which peer educators would be expected to master as a result of participating in their programs. However, the most important thing for program coordinators to realize is that when they are developing these learning outcomes they must also decide how they will measure them and obtain the evidence needed to definitively know whether or not outcomes are achieved.

This researcher recognizes that the peer education programs for which program coordinators are responsible are often only one portion of their job responsibilities. In fact, a small number of program coordinators indicate that they would do more with assessing peer educator learning and development if only they had time, but that often, the other portions of their job responsibilities get in the way. Some program coordinators also lack a significant amount of experience with developing and assessing learning outcomes and may not have the foundational knowledge to design formal assessment tools which measure peer educator learning and development. The researcher acknowledges and respects both of these factors but also knows through personal experience that these challenge can be overcome, particularly if program
coordinators are concerned about the developmental needs of all of the students with whom the
interact. As a result, the researcher recommends that program coordinators collaborate with those
campus individuals who have previous experience with the assessment of student learning
outcomes. It also is highly recommended that program coordinators involve current peer
educators or those who have previously served in their programs in the process of developing
and assessing learning outcomes. It is important to mention that a small number of program
coordinators reported realizing the importance of having experienced peer educators involved in
the process of helping them develop learning outcome statements for assessment. This
recognition comes from the fact that experienced peer educators know best the learning and
developmental growth which occurs as a result of participation in these types of roles and
positions and can help portray these types of outcomes in a language which students can
understand and on which they can assess themselves.

The next step the researcher recommends is for program coordinators to focus attention
on developing learning outcomes for peer educator training. It is possible that these outcomes
could even relate back to the overall learning objectives. Using the previous example, a section
of training might be devoted to ethical issues related to the position. If understanding
confidentiality was one area of training related to ethical issues, a good example of a learning
outcome for training might be “The peer educator will understand the importance of
confidentiality in the mentoring process.” Program coordinators could develop a short evaluation
tool which would ask peer educators to rate themselves on whether or not this outcome was
achieved. Of course, an effective evaluation tool would also include a section of self-reflection
questions so that peer educators could provide their own personal perceptions of how much they
felt they had mastered training content and offer suggestions for areas where additional training
is required. The development of a training evaluation tool could provide program coordinators with additional pre-experience information regarding peer educator learning and development, particularly because at this point, the peer educators would have completed training but not yet begun their term of service. This could offer program coordinators an early picture of outcome areas on which peer educators believe they need additional knowledge or training. This information could also help program coordinators to identify and respond to possible “red flags” of concern much earlier in the experience and may even help them to avoid potentially problematic ethical situations which they would otherwise not be able to predict.

All of the program coordinators in this study referenced the close personal relationships which they have with their peer educators and some have even created ways (i.e. awards, banquets, certificates) to recognize the efforts of their peer educators. During these recognition events, program coordinators usually conduct some type of informal assessment, often in the form of group discussions, where peer educators provide the anecdotal evidence which was referenced so often during the course of this study. These recognition events could also serve as a primary means for having peer educators complete a final assessment of their overall experience and their learning and growth. Similar to the assessment method previously discussed for peer educator training, an assessment tool could be developed asking peer educators to rate their competency on each relevant knowledge and skill outcome. This tool should also include self-reflection questions which allow peer educators to discuss the overall knowledge and skills they felt they achieved from their experience.

When compared with the ratings from training, a final assessment tool could offer program coordinators a better picture of the knowledge and competencies peer educators attained from their overall experience. This assessment could also give peer educators an opportunity to
reflect back on their training and whether or not what they learned from it helped adequately prepare them for their experience. The self-reflective portion of this assessment could be used by program coordinators to learn more about the perceptions peer educators have about the overall peer education program and gather information on suggestions for improvement. This researcher also recommends providing the peer educators with an opportunity to offer advice to future students who may serve as peer educators. This would provide an additional means for reflecting on what was learned from the entire process from recruitment to training to the end result and could greatly assist program coordinators with improving the experience for future peer educators.

The development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators is of vital importance, particularly if program coordinators indicate that they have clear expectations for the developmental learning and growth which peer educators are to experience from serving in their programs. Program coordinators cannot establish learning outcome statements for peer educators and say that they have definitive evidence of whether or not those outcomes are achieved without also developing the necessary formal assessment methods which measure these outcomes and provide substantive evidence of whether or not learning and growth actually occurred. If program coordinators are concerned with creating experiences which are developmentally beneficial for all of the students participating in their programs, then they must intentionally develop learning outcomes and formal assessment processes which not only articulate intentions for peer educator learning and development but also measure the extent to which outcomes are achieved. The information provided through such an assessment process will provide program coordinators with important evidence of peer educator learning and developmental growth which they can use to further improve the peer educator experience. They can also share this evidence
of learning and growth with various campus constituents to further validate the important usage and benefits of involving peer educators in efforts to provide guidance and support to first-year students.

Need for Future Research

This study addresses a significant lack of literature on the processes and methods used by program coordinators to develop and assess learning outcomes for peer educators. It is highly recommended that further research be conducted in this area to substantiate the findings of this study. Additional studies should also involve program coordinators who have served in their positions for longer than five years as well as feature program coordinators who work at two-year colleges and universities. An effective research design should also involve a more intensive case study approach where several program coordinators beginning to establish a process for developing and assessing learning outcomes for peer educators are interviewed at regular intervals to gain a more detailed and comprehensive picture of the complex issues surrounding this type of assessment process. Research is also required to substantiate specific categories of overall learning outcomes and competencies which are universally used to evaluate peer educator learning and development in a variety of roles and positions. Using these categories, research should be conducted to develop and test a possible rating scale which program coordinators could adapt for usage in their own programs as a way of more fully ascertaining the level of knowledge and competency achieved by peer educators. The researcher also is aware of a number of programs, including those represented by this study, where program coordinators have done little to publicize their efforts beyond presenting at regional or national conferences. While supportive of the sharing of information and programmatic innovations at these types of conferences, the researcher highly recommends that program coordinators do more to publish
specific assessment processes and methods which document the learning and developmental gains achieved by peer educators.

While it is not directly tied to the results of this study, the researcher has noticed that the last study on the usage of peer educators by colleges and universities was conducted in the early 1990s (Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993). The apparent trend on this area of research involved at least one study per decade addressing this area of peer educator research. As a result, this researcher recommends that a similar study be conducted sometime before the end of this decade so that the historical study of the usage and expansion of peer educator roles continue to be documented.

Chapter Summary

The development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators is not an intentional process. While program coordinators can easily articulate their expectations for peer educator learning and development and provide evidence of formal and informal learning outcome statements, they have not intentionally developed learning outcomes with consideration as to how to measure these outcomes. Program coordinators rely heavily on anecdotal evidence and self-reflective assessment tools and have not considered how to formally measure outcomes in a manner which would provide substantive evidence that learning and development has occurred. They provide little evidence of learning outcomes tied to peer educator training and have not considered how to formally evaluate the impact training has on peer educator learning and development. Program coordinators have expectations that peer educators will achieve increased competency in professional skill areas, particularly in areas of interpersonal communication and leadership. While the information gained from self-reflective assessment tools is used to improve the peer educator experience, program coordinators must do more to
intentionally engage in the development and assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators. Engaging in a formalized assessment process will provide the evidence of whether or not learning outcomes are actually achieved. More importantly, it will offer program coordinators additional information which they can use to develop peer education programs which are not only beneficial to the first-year students which they are designed to serve but which also significantly impact the learning and developmental growth of the peer educators who serve in them.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Participant Solicitation E-mail Messages with Research Protocol

Dear FYA Listserv Subscriber,

My name is Brad Harmon, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia.

I am writing you to invite your participation in a research study designed to understand the specific process through which peer educator program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators.

Please respond to this email message directly at bvharmon@uga.edu if you can answer the following questions:

1) Do you coordinate a peer educator program designed to meet the needs of first-year students?

2) Is your peer educator program based outside of a residence life setting?

3) Have you initiated a process to develop and assess learning outcomes for the peer educators in your program?

4) Would be willing to participate in detailed interviews regarding the specific process and methods you used to develop and assess learning outcomes for the peer educators in your program?

Questions about this study should be referred to Brad Harmon via email at bvharmon@uga.edu or by phone at 706-389-6053. All interested participants will be contacted directly by phone and invited to be a part of the study. All information obtained from interviews will be considered confidential.

While this research study has been approved by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, it is not affiliated with the center in any way. Interested participants should understand that they will not directly benefit from participation in this study. However, their participation may advance the available literature which can assist program coordinators with program development and modification, the assessment of student learning outcomes for students serving as peer educators, and the improvement of the experience for the peer educators.

This research is under the direction of Dr. Diane Cooper, Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia, who can be reached at 706-542-4120 or via email at dlcooper@uga.edu. Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; e-mail address IRB@uga.edu.
Dear FYE Listserv Subscriber,

My name is Brad Harmon, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia.

I am writing you to invite your participation in a research study designed to understand the specific process through which peer educator program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators.

Please respond to this email message directly at bvharmon@uga.edu if you can answer the following questions:

1) Do you coordinate a peer educator program designed to meet the needs of first-year students?

2) Is your peer educator program based outside of a residence life setting?

3) Have you initiated a process to develop and assess learning outcomes for the peer educators in your program?

4) Would be willing to participate in detailed interviews regarding the specific process and methods you used to develop and assess learning outcomes for the peer educators in your program?

Questions about this study should be referred to Brad Harmon via email at bvharmon@uga.edu or by phone at 706-389-6053. All interested participants will be contacted directly by phone and invited to be a part of the study. All information obtained from interviews will be considered confidential.

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This research is under the direction of Dr. Diane Cooper, Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia, who can be reached at 706-542-4120 or via email at dlcooper@uga.edu. Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; e-mail address IRB@uga.edu.
Dear Peer Advising Listserv Subscriber,

My name is Brad Harmon, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia.

I am writing you to invite your participation in a research study designed to understand the specific process through which peer educator program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators.

Please respond to this email message directly at bvharmon@uga.edu if you can answer the following questions:

1) Do you coordinate a peer educator program designed to meet the needs of first-year students?

2) Is your peer educator program based outside of a residence life setting?

3) Have you initiated a process to develop and assess learning outcomes for the peer educators in your program?

4) Would be willing to participate in detailed interviews regarding the specific process and methods you used to develop and assess learning outcomes for the peer educators in your program?

Questions about this study should be referred to Brad Harmon via email at bvharmon@uga.edu or by phone at 706-389-6053. All interested participants will be contacted directly by phone and invited to be a part of the study. All information obtained from interviews will be considered confidential.

While this research study has been approved by the National Academic Advising Association, it is not affiliated with this organization in any way. Interested participants should understand that they will not directly benefit from participation in this study. However, their participation may advance the available literature which can assist program coordinators with program development and modification, the assessment of student learning outcomes for students serving as peer educators, and the improvement of the experience for the peer educators.

This research is under the direction of Dr. Diane Cooper, Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia, who can be reached at 706-542-4120 or via email at dlcooper@uga.edu. Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; e-mail address IRB@uga.edu.
Appendix B

Sample Letter to Study Participants

May 9, 2007

Name
Name of Institution
Address Line 1
Address Line 2

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. (name goes here),

I greatly enjoyed speaking with you this morning about my research study. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my study. As I mentioned on the phone, I have included two copies of the Informed Consent Form. Please take a few minutes to read over the form, sign and date it, and then return one copy to me in the enclosed envelope and keep one for your records. Should you have any questions about the form or at any time prior to our phone interview, please feel free to contact me directly at 706-202-9011 or email me at bvharmon@uga.edu. I greatly appreciate your willingness to participate in my dissertation research and look forward to speaking with you on May 23, 2007 from 10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Sincerely,

Brad Harmon
Ph.D. Candidate
Counseling and Student Personnel Services
College of Education
University of Georgia

Enclosures
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

I agree to take part in a research study entitled “A Qualitative Study Exploring the Processes and Methods Used by Peer Education Program Coordinators to Design and Assess Learning Outcomes for Peer Educators” which is being conducted by Brad Harmon from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia (706-389-6053). This research is under the direction of Dr. Diane Cooper, Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia, who can be reached at 706-542-4120 or via email at dlcooper@uga.edu.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to understand the specific process through which peer educator program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and to discover how the information gathered through is process is used to evaluate peer educator performance, determine whether or not the designated learning outcomes have been achieved, and improve the peer education experience for the peer educators. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that I do not have to take part in this study and that I am free to withdraw my participation, without giving any reason and without penalty, at any time during the study. I understand I have the right to ask that any information related to me be returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I will not benefit directly from this research. However, my participation in this study may advance the available literature that will assist peer education program coordinators with program development and the assessment of student learning outcomes for students serving as peer educators as well as how to design learning processes which evaluate peer educator performance and improve the experience for the peer educators.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1. I will read and sign this consent form prior to the interview with the researcher. (Be sure to ask any questions if you have them.)

2. I agree to participate in a 60-90 minute interview with the researcher to be arranged at a mutually convenient time which is designed to examine the process and methods I used to develop and assess learning outcomes for students serving as peer educators. I understand this interview will be digitally recorded by the researcher. I understand that digital recordings will be destroyed following the completion of transcriptions and member checks. The recordings will be destroyed by May 1, 2008.

3. I understand I will be given the opportunity to review either the themes identified from my interview transcript or a copy of my actual interview transcript in order to verify its accuracy. I will have the opportunity to tell the researcher if I wish to review the entire transcript, a summary of the themes, or both and may offer any additional clarifying remarks I feel are necessary for accurate interpretation.
4. I agree to provide the researcher access to important documents, where available, such as program proposal and implementation plans, selection and training guidelines, informational brochures, and other relevant documents. I understand that the examination of these documents will be used in order for the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the situational context surrounding the process I used to develop and assess learning outcomes for peer educators as well as offer a glimpse of intended learning outcomes for peer educators.

5. I understand that in order to assure my responses are kept confidential and my identity concealed, a pseudonym will be assigned to me and my name will not be used anywhere in the data. I understand that at no time during the course of the study will the specific identity of my college or university be used and that an institutional descriptor will be assigned by the researcher to further protect my identity during the presentation of study results.

6. I understand that as a token of appreciation for participating in this study, I will receive a $10.00 gift card for a bookstore of my choice.

7. I understand that information obtained during the course of this study may be used for future research.

No discomforts or stresses are expected. No risks are expected to any participant. The results of this participation will be confidential.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the study, and can be reached at 706-389-6053 or via email at bvharmon@uga.edu.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I will be provided with a copy of this form for my personal records.

Signature of Participant: ________________________________ Date: ________________

Name of Participant: ________________________________

Signature of Researcher: ______________________________ Date: ________________

Name of Researcher: Brad Harmon  Telephone: 706-389-6053  Email: bvharmon@uga.edu

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; email address IRB@uga.edu.
Appendix D

Sample Sociodemographic Data Sheet

Current age: ________

Gender affiliation: ________

Race/Ethnicity: ________

Institutional type:  ___Public  ___Private  ___2-Year  ___4-Year

Professional status:  ___Faculty  ___Staff  ___Administrator  ___Other (please explain): __________________________

How long have you served as the coordinator of your peer education program? ______________

How long has your peer educator program been in existence? ______________

How many peer educators currently serve in your program? ______________

To what administrative department does your peer education program report? ______________

What previous experience have you had with the development and assessment of learning outcomes? ________________

How long have you been assessing learning outcomes for the peer educators? ________________
Appendix E

Interview Question Protocol

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the specific process through which peer educator program coordinators develop and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and to discover how the information gathered through this process is used to evaluate peer educator performance, determine whether or not the designated learning outcomes have been achieved, and improve the peer education experience for the peer educators.

RQ1: Do program coordinators intentionally design and assess learning outcomes for peer educators?

RQ2: What types of learning outcomes are developed by program coordinators for peer educator training and how are the results from the assessment of these outcomes used to gauge peer educator performance throughout their term of service?

RQ3: What types of overall programmatic learning outcomes are developed by program coordinators for students who serve as peer educators?

RQ4: What specific methods are used by program coordinators to assess and measure learning outcomes for peer educators and determine whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved?

RQ5: How is the information gained from the assessment and measurement of learning outcomes for peer educators used by program coordinators in order to improve the peer education experience for peer educators?

Potential Interview Questions

IQ1: Who are the students who serve as peer educators at your institution?

IQ2: What are the specific role and responsibilities of the peer educators for the program you coordinate?

IQ3: What kinds of expectations do you have for students serving as peer educators?

IQ4: What knowledge and competencies do you think students need to have in order to be effective peer educators?

IQ5: What additional knowledge and competencies do you expect students who serve as peer educators will gain by the end of their experience as peer educators?

IQ6: What kinds of methods do you use to evaluate the performance of peer educators?
IQ7: What kinds of methods do you use to determine how students were affected by their experience as peer educators?

IQ8: How did the process of developing learning outcomes for the peer educators begin?

IQ9: What were your objectives for developing and assessing learning outcomes for the peer educators?

IQ10: What impact did the institutional and/or departmental mission have on the development of learning outcomes for the peer educators?

IQ11: What impact did institutional and/or departmental values have on the development of learning outcomes for the peer educators?

IQ12: Who was involved in the process of developing learning outcomes for the peer educators?

IQ13: What role did peer educators have in the process of developing learning outcomes for themselves?

IQ14: What challenges did you face in designing learning outcomes for the peer educators?

IQ15: How did you decide upon the criteria and methods for assessing the learning outcomes you developed for the peer educators?

IQ16: How did you decide upon a timeline for the development and assessment of learning outcomes for the peer educators?

IQ17: What did you expect to learn from the assessment of the learning outcomes you developed for the peer educators?

IQ18: What types of training do you conduct for the peer educators?

IQ19: What types of learning outcomes have you established for peer educator training?

IQ20: What specific methods have you used to assess the learning outcomes for peer educator training?

IQ21: How have you used the information gained from the assessment of learning outcomes for peer educator training?

IQ22: What types of learning outcomes have you developed for the overall peer education experience?

IQ23: What specific methods have you used to assess the learning outcomes for the overall peer education experience?
IQ24: How have you used the information gained from the assessment of learning outcomes to improve the experience for the peer educators?

IQ25: How have you used the information gained from the assessment of learning outcomes for peer educators to modify existing practices?

IQ26: What means have you used to publish the results of the assessment of learning outcomes for the peer educators?

IQ27: What have you learned from the process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for the peer educators?