How Learning Assistants Can Help Foster Active Learning

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Learning Centers
https://rlc.rutgers.edu/student-info/group-and-individual-academic-support/learning-assistant-program

Learning Assistant Program

• The Learning Assistant Program is a national program developed at University of Colorado, Boulder.
• Learning Assistants (LAs) are students who work with faculty to create collaborative learning environments.
This instructor wants to be doing more active learning!

Active Learning

When you are one instructor in a room with students, it is a challenge to:

- Approach all of the groups
- Address every question that comes up
- Facilitate learning and ensure everyone is on track
Learning Assistant Program

- Learning Assistants
  - Undergraduate students
  - Earned a B+ or an A in the course
  - Hired in a future semester to be a Learning Assistant for that course
  - Will work with the instructor or TA in lecture, lab, recitation, or leading a study group

How are courses “transformed”? 

Traditional

Transformed

Students
Faculty Quote

“I knew the LA program would be a great learning experience for the LA's themselves and also allow me to incorporate more active learning tools in my classroom with 200 students. What I did not expect was how much I learned from the feedback from my LAs. Throughout the course, they have provided me with thoughtful constructive suggestions and how to better communicate with students. I have used many of their suggestions in my lectures and the course is improved because of them.”

Dr. Asa Rennermalm
Associate Professor
Department of Geography Undergraduate Program Director

LA Quotes

“Being a learning assistant has been one of my favorite experiences at Rutgers over the last 4 years. It's something I always look forward to every week.” - Zac

“This position has definitely opened doors for me and I have learned how to be a better learner and better facilitator this past year.” - Sarah
“A was the best LA ever. She was genuinely passionate about making sure we understood concepts. She has inspired me to also pursue a double major in math and computer science and to be a LA next year.”

What makes a Learning Assistant?
Three Essential Elements

CONTENT: LAs have weekly staff meetings with faculty of the course they are supporting

PRACTICE: LAs have contact time with students in lecture, lab, recitation, or study group

PEDAGOGY: LAs co-enroll in Peer Instructor Education course
Content Prep Meetings

• Meet weekly with faculty of the course
• Review material that will be coming up
• Discuss the material recently covered in the course
  – LAs may have insight into student questions or issues
• Dialogue between LAs and faculty for benefit of students

Three Essential Elements

CONTENT:
LAs have weekly staff meetings with faculty of the course they are supporting

PRACTICE:
LAs have contact time with students in lecture, lab, recitation, or study group

PEDAGOGY:
LAs co-enroll in Peer Instructor Education course
Pedagogy:

• At Rutgers, LAs take a 300-level, 3 credit Peer Instructor Education course
  – Topics include
    • Effective Questioning
    • Metacognition
    • Cooperative Learning
    • Diversity
  – Assignments include
    • Teaching Philosophy statement
    • Interview Project
    • Weekly reading quizzes

What LAs do not do:

• At Rutgers, LAs do not:
  – Hold 1-on-1 tutoring or office hours
  – Grade
  – Proctor
### Benefits of LA Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>LAs</th>
<th>Students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support for their students</td>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>Collaborative learning environment</td>
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<td>Dialog with Learning Assistants</td>
<td>Stipend of $1500 a semester</td>
<td>Near-peer in educator role</td>
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### LA Program is centralized in the Learning Centers

- The LCs provides the following support to departments:
  - Teach pedagogy course and provide professional development training
  - Coordinate LA applications, interviewing, hiring
  - Employment on-boarding and weekly payroll
  - Coordinate assignments and LA schedules
Growth of LA Program at Rutgers

Learning Assistant timeline

Faculty Applications open
(November – late January 2018)
https://rlc.rutgers.edu/student-info/group-and-individual-academic-support/learning-assistant-program

Faculty Advisory Board approves courses for LAs
February 2018

Students apply to be LAs
February – March 2018

Interviews & Hiring for ‘18–’19 year
March - May 2018
Interested in having LAs in your course?

- If you teach at Rutgers-New Brunswick:
  - Please fill out this interest form: [https://tinyurl.com/yaxkpzqa](https://tinyurl.com/yaxkpzqa)

- If you teach at another school:
  - Reach out to me and I can let you know if there is an LA Program at that school!
    (alice.seneres@rutgers.edu)
  - Consult the LA Alliance website
    [https://www.learningassistantalliance.org/](https://www.learningassistantalliance.org/)

Questions?

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Learning Assistant Alliance website:
[https://www.learningassistantalliance.org/](https://www.learningassistantalliance.org/)