The University of South Carolina
Office of Student Engagement
Peer Leader Executive Summary Report
2008-2009

Compiled by:

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“I enjoy putting time into things that matter, like people. I decided to become involved in peer leadership to fill my free time with things that would build value in my life and others.”

“Interacting with a diverse student population makes you reflect on how you see the world, your place in it and your own cultural background. This helps me increase my ability to tolerate differences, not only in race but in gender, religion and many more areas.”

“I am more aware of myself now and how each decision I make will not only reflect upon me, but upon the organizations I represent and the university as well.”

“I feel needed and an asset to this USC community. I don’t feel like I am taking so much, but giving back.”

The Peer Leader Survey was first conducted in the spring 2008 for the purpose of understanding of what peer leaders are gaining from their experience. The survey was created to assess student perceptions of learning that occurred as a result of their peer leader positions. In the spring of 2009 with some adjustments based on feedback from peer leader advisors, the survey was re-administered, along with focused follow-up surveys with select participants from the 2009 survey.

For the purposes of this research, we are using a definition by Ender (as cited in Ender & Kay, 2001, p. 1) in which peer leaders are defined 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” (p. 324). This definition is intentionally broad in order to capture a wide range of students involved in peer to peer leadership experiences.

**Total Peer Leaders:** approximately 753  
**Total Responses:** 190 (25.2% response rate)  

Peer Leader groups surveyed:

- Gamecocks Advocating the Mature Management of Alcohol and Other Drugs (GAMMA)  
- Sexual Health Awareness and Rape Education (SHARE)  
- Peer Health Educator (PHE)  
- Resident Mentors (RM)  
- Residence Hall Association (RHA) Executive Board  
- Student Ambassadors  
- U101 Peer Leaders  
- Minority Assistance Peer Program (MAPP) Counselors  
- EMPOWER  
- Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leaders  
- Out-of-State Mentors, Transfer Mentors  
- First-Year Call Center (FYCC) staff  
- Academic Tutors  
- Study Abroad Peers  
- SEED  
- Carolina Productions (CP) Programming Board  
- Carolina Service Council (CSC)  
- Carolina Judicial Council (CJC)  
- Student Government (SG)  
- Orientation Leaders  
- Gamecock Leadership Society
Significant Results

**Comparison of the 2008 and 2009 Peer Leadership Survey Results**

Percentages of responses where students moderately or strongly agreed that their peer leadership experience contributed to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>2008 Survey Percentage</th>
<th>2009 Survey Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive overall experience at USC</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>97.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would recommend peer leadership to others</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>97.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved time management skills</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>86.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated them to model appropriate behavior</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>94.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided interaction with diverse populations</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>91.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased knowledge of University services</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>96.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased interaction with faculty</td>
<td>90.69</td>
<td>90.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More comfortable speaking in front of groups</td>
<td>94.12</td>
<td>91.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel comfortable guiding others in their decision making</td>
<td>94.71</td>
<td>95.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel comfortable guiding others in times of difficulty</td>
<td>90.69</td>
<td>96.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel more comfortable taking leadership role in group</td>
<td>91.28</td>
<td>92.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowed to interact with diverse group of students</td>
<td>91.81</td>
<td>91.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questions added in 2009**

- Improved oral communication skills
- Hold self more accountable for own behaviors
- Have matured
- Improved confidence for facing future challenges
- Increased confidence interacting with faculty
- Better able to conduct self in professional manner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>2008 Survey Percentage</th>
<th>2009 Survey Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I take academics more seriously</td>
<td>47.37</td>
<td>35.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My stress management skills have improved</td>
<td>46.32</td>
<td>32.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being involved in peer leadership has supported my academic success</td>
<td>52.11</td>
<td>35.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My written communication skills have improved</td>
<td>47.16</td>
<td>28.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** In the 2008 survey, affirmative responses included agree and strongly agree, whereas in the 2009 survey the affirmative responses included moderately agree and strongly agree.

*In these areas of the 2009 findings we saw higher percentages of moderately agree than strongly agree responses, which merit future consideration and/or research:*
Recommendations

Based on 2009 findings, including survey and follow-up responses, we make recommendations in the following areas:

- **Future research** – explore relationship between stress and peer leadership in order to better understand the stressors of peer leaders, their coping skills, need for training on stress management, and the impact of stress on their performance.
- **Advertisement of Peer Leadership opportunities** – students need better communication about the variety of peer leadership opportunities available as well as details about application process.
- **Increase recruitment efforts through nomination process** – students, staff, and faculty need to be encouraged to nominate students for peer leadership opportunities.
- **Provide more professional development and advancement opportunities** – offer additional training, certifications, credentialing, skill building, career preparation, and support participation in conferences to help students develop new skills, acquire new knowledge, network, and bridge the peer leadership experience to career aspirations.
- **Provide rewards to all Peer Leaders** – students need some form of compensation or tangible benefit for the time and energy they put forth.
- **Encourage retention of trained peer leaders** – explore actions that will retain qualified and trained peer leaders.

Based on the 2008 findings the following is an update on progress made toward the 2008 recommendations:

- **Recommendation: Distribution of information to students** – students should have a centralized location to find information on being a peer leader.
  **Progress made:** A webpage on the Office of Student Engagement website was created to centralize information about peer leadership opportunities. Students can access this information at [www.sc.edu/studentengagement/peerleadership.html](http://www.sc.edu/studentengagement/peerleadership.html) and from there are directed to individual offices to get more information about specific peer leadership experiences.
- **Recommendation: Peer Leader specific recognition** – peer leaders should be better recognized for their contributions and efforts to the University community.
  **Progress made:** Peer leaders are spotlighted on the Peer Leadership webpage at the Office of Student Engagement website. Financial constraints have limited the type of recognition we could offer.
- **Recommendation: Peer Leader to Peer Leader Network** – provide peer leader groups opportunities to interact socially and professionally.
  **Progress made:** no progress has been made on this front although the advisors of the peer groups believe it would be beneficial to the peer leadership experience.
- **Training sessions and materials** – information could be centralized because of similarities discovered and to prevent repetition between training sessions
  **Progress made:** Discussion among the peer leader advisors have centered on opportunities for streamlining the training process, but also the recruitment and nomination processes. Common forms for nominations and recommendations have been explored and developed. Discussion of a common course for peer leadership training has occurred. Other opportunities for streamlined training around common skill sets across peer leadership experiences are being explored.
- **Further research** – this research should be repeated and expanded upon
  **Progress made:** The USC Peer Leadership Survey was updated and re-administered in the spring of 2009. The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition created a national survey on peer leadership and administered a pilot in the spring of 2009.