

**Leading by Example:  
A Case Study of Peer Leader Programs at Two  
Achieving the Dream Colleges**

**Oscar Cerna  
Caitlin Platania  
with Kelley Fong**

**February 2012**



Primary funding for the Massachusetts Achieving the Dream evaluation and case study report was provided by the Boston Foundation. Additional funding for this report was provided by the Lumina Foundation for Education. The Massachusetts Achieving the Dream colleges also received support from the Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation, the Irene E. and George Davis Foundation, and The Educational Resources Institute (TERI).

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following funders that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Ambrose Monell Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Kresge Foundation, Sandler Foundation, and The Starr Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our Web site: [www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org).

Copyright © 2012 by MDRC.® All rights reserved.

## Overview

This report draws on the experiences of two Massachusetts community colleges that employed academically successful students to serve as peer leaders. The Achieving the Dream initiative supports colleges' investments in the resources and personnel needed to make desired institution-wide changes. As part of the initiative, Northern Essex Community College has used Supplemental Instruction Leaders, and Bunker Hill Community College has used Peer Mentors in order to strengthen student success and promote institutional improvement efforts.

Both colleges chose to implement peer leader programs in developmental (remedial) and gatekeeper (introductory college-level) courses that have historically been difficult for many students to pass. This report describes recruitment, training, activities, and costs related to developing these peer leader programs as well as how peer leaders worked with students and faculty inside the classroom. Students, peer leaders, faculty, and administrators offered perspectives in focus groups and interviews during the 2010-2011 academic year. Key findings include the following:

- **Peer leaders at both colleges offered additional academic assistance to students** by introducing and reinforcing lessons covered in class and by helping their faculty partners facilitate classroom activities.
- **Program staff and faculty members recruited and selected peer leaders with strong academic and interpersonal skills.** However, specific peer leader tasks and functions inside and outside the classroom varied based on how assigned faculty members agreed to have peer leaders work with students.
- **Students in peer-assisted courses generally felt that they benefited from receiving peer leaders' guidance and support,** and they appreciated that this guidance and support was provided by fellow students.
- **Both colleges have expanded their peer leader programs across sections and disciplines,** prompting them to establish more program standards and articulate more practices. College administrators generally considered the programs affordable and cost-effective.

The development of peer leader programs at Northern Essex and Bunker Hill reveals innovative ways in which colleges can enhance student learning and engagement in community college classrooms. Over the past years, both colleges have carefully implemented and expanded peer leader programs for students in need of extra support. Peer leaders provide a unique perspective for students and have the ability to create a learning environment unlike that of the typical instructor-student relationship. Community colleges interested in creating or expanding their own peer leader programs may find lessons in the theoretical, operational, and fiscal challenges and considerations that marked the implementation of the two programs discussed in this report.



# Contents

<b>Overview</b>	iii
<b>List of Exhibits</b>	vii
<b>Preface</b>	ix
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	xi
<b>Executive Summary</b>	ES-1

## Chapter

<b>1 Introduction</b>	1
About This Report	1
How and Why the Colleges Were Chosen	3
Institutional Profiles	4
Two Models of Peer Leadership: Supplemental Instruction Leaders and Peer Mentors	7
Methodology	9
The Organization of This Report	10
<b>2 Supplemental Instruction at Northern Essex Community College</b>	13
Introduction	13
Program Structure	14
Recruitment, Selection, and Training	15
Program Interactions and Perceptions	17
Data Collection and Analysis	20
Program Costs	21
Challenges and Next Steps	22
<b>3 Peer Mentoring at Bunker Hill Community College</b>	25
Introduction	25
Program Structure	26
Recruitment, Selection, and Training	29
Program Interactions and Perceptions	30
Data Collection and Analysis	32
Program Costs	34
Challenges and Next Steps	35
<b>4 Summary and Future Considerations</b>	37
The Contributions of Peer Leaders to Their Colleges	37
Considerations for Future Program Development	38
Conclusion	42

**Appendix**

**A** Interviews and Focus Groups Conducted at Northern Essex Community College 45

**B** Interviews and Focus Groups Conducted at Bunker Hill Community College 49

**References** 53

**Earlier MDRC Publications on Achieving the Dream** 55

# List of Exhibits

## Table

1.1	Selected Characteristics of Northern Essex Community College (NECC) and Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) Students, Fall 2010	5
1.2	Main Features of Peer Leader Programs	8

## Figure

2.1	Program Scale-Up for Supplemental Instruction (SI) Sections, Northern Essex Community College (NECC), Spring 2009 to Spring 2011	14
2.2	Student Course Completion, Sections With and Without Supplemental Instruction (SI), Northern Essex Community College (NECC), Fall 2009 and Fall 2010	21
3.1	Program Scale-Up for Peer Mentor Program, Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), Fall 2009 to Spring 2011	27
3.2	Term-to-Term Retention, Freshman Seminars With and Without Peer Mentors, Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), Fall 2009 to Spring 2011	34

## Box

1.1	Achieving the Dream	3
2.1	Peer Profile: Andy, Supplemental Instruction Leader, Northern Essex Community College	16
3.1	Peer Profile: Keisha, Peer Mentor, Bunker Hill Community College	28





## Preface

Community colleges are faced with the task of serving a broad population of diverse students. Students entering these institutions, particularly those who begin at developmental (or remedial) levels in mathematics, reading, and writing, often do so with multiple barriers impeding their potential success. Unfortunately, the majority of these students never graduate or drop out altogether.

To address these problems, community colleges across the country have joined the Lumina Foundation for Education's Achieving the Dream initiative, which involves efforts by community colleges to increase their institutional capacity to make data-driven decisions to promote academic success. A consortium of funders, led by the Boston Foundation, provided support for Massachusetts community colleges in the initiative and selected MDRC to conduct an evaluation of the development and implementation of the initiative at these colleges.

Two of the colleges, Northern Essex Community College and Bunker Hill Community College, are the focus of this case study report. These institutions have employed students as peer leaders in developmental and introductory courses to offer academic assistance and social support to students who come to college underprepared for college-level work. The report highlights how college administrators, faculty, and staff went about designing, piloting, and institutionalizing these programs and offers insights into students' experiences in these peer-assisted courses. Furthermore, the report explores the influence that these leadership roles have had on the peer leaders' own academic and personal accomplishments. Colleges that are considering instituting or expanding peer leadership programs will find value in learning how Northern Essex and Bunker Hill implemented these programs, which offer great potential for improving the academic outcomes of students who are most at risk.

Gordon L. Berlin  
President



## Acknowledgments

This report is made possible by the support from the Boston Foundation. We are grateful for the foundation's generous and steadfast support for this report. We especially thank Nahir Torres at the Boston Foundation, who provided guidance and support for our evaluation of Achieving the Dream in Massachusetts and for the development of this case study report.

MDRC appreciates the cooperation of Northern Essex Community College and Bunker Hill Community College in serving as case study sites. At Northern Essex, we thank Lane Glenn and William Heineman for helping coordinate our field visits, Thomas Fallon for helping us collect and review institutional data, Karletty Medina for providing program information, and the rest of the faculty, staff, and students who agreed to participate in interviews and focus groups about the Supplemental Instruction program. At Bunker Hill, we thank Jan Bonanno for coordinating our field visits, Lori Catalozzi and Liya Escalera for providing program information, David Leavitt for providing institutional and program data, and the rest of the college's faculty and staff who shared information and insights that gave us a better understanding of the Peer Mentoring program. We especially appreciate the contributions of the Supplemental Instruction Leaders and Peer Mentors from both colleges who told us about their experiences as peer leaders. Particular thanks to Andrew Wysocki and Keisha LaRosa, whose experiences are highlighted in the report's Peer Profiles.

We are also grateful to the many people who read and reviewed this report. We are particularly grateful to those individuals, including Thomas Brock and Elizabeth Zachry Rutschow at MDRC, who gave feedback to the researchers throughout the development of the Massachusetts Achieving the Dream evaluation. We gratefully acknowledge the written comments on the report offered by Thomas Brock, Elizabeth Zachry Rutschow, Janet Quint, and John Hutchins at MDRC. We also appreciate the help that we received from Genevieve Orr during the early phases of the study and from Kelley Fong during the final phases of our work on the report.

Susan Blank and Margaret Bald edited the report, and David Sobel and Stephanie Cowell prepared it for publication.

The Authors



# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The growing number of students seeking an accessible, low-cost higher education has led to surging enrollments at community colleges nationwide. Many of these students enter college academically underprepared and are required to pass developmental (remedial) education courses in math or English. Getting through the developmental education sequence can be difficult, however, and most students who are assigned to these courses generally do not end up persisting to college-level courses in English or math, let alone completing the requirements needed to eventually graduate or transfer.

Community colleges are exploring new teaching and learning approaches to help a larger, more diverse population of students pass through their developmental courses and go on to succeed in the college curriculum. One promising approach is to recruit and train students who have successfully completed these courses and have a solid mastery of their content to help their fellow students as “peer leaders.” Colleges hope and expect that peer leaders can help to engage students who would otherwise feel lost or uninterested in their classes and provide additional academic assistance in a cost-effective way at a time of budget cuts.

In 2007, four community colleges in Massachusetts joined the national Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count initiative in order to create data-informed classroom and campus strategies designed to increase academic success and persistence in developmental and “gatekeeper” (introductory college-level) courses. The Boston Foundation provided support for MDRC to conduct a two-year study of the implementation of Achieving the Dream in Massachusetts, which included in-depth case studies on two of the colleges: Northern Essex and Bunker Hill Community Colleges. This report highlights how these two colleges recruited and trained academically successful students to serve as Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leaders and first-year seminar Peer Mentors — together referred to in this report as “peer leaders” — to bolster the learning and course completion of their fellow students in their developmental and gatekeeper courses.

As part of Achieving the Dream, Northern Essex — a community college in northeastern Massachusetts that serves over 7,000 students annually — has gradually scaled up its SI program to provide student-to-student assistance in developmental and college-level math courses. SI Leaders are students who have successfully completed the courses or have demonstrated strong academic competency in the courses’ subject matter. SI Leaders regularly attend their assigned class and arrange a separate voluntary study session for students in the class to receive more individualized help or review topics from the course lectures.

Bunker Hill Community College, located in central Boston, has seen its enrollment increase exponentially over the last decade and currently serves over 12,000 culturally diverse students. To address incoming students' lack of preparation for college course work, Bunker Hill developed and institutionalized seminar courses for first-year students to acclimate them to college. Each seminar is tied to an academic or societal theme of interest to students and covers lessons about adjusting to college, developing effective study skills, and learning about campus resources. Unique to these seminars are Peer Mentors, who help the seminar instructors convey lessons and content through the student lens and are accessible outside of class to provide support to students enrolled in the course.

This report presents case studies of the peer leader programs at Northern Essex and Bunker Hill. The findings reported are based on interviews, focus groups, program reports, and institutional data. During site visits to each college, researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with administrators, faculty members, peer leaders, and students who participated in the peer leader programs. These qualitative data, along with data from follow-up correspondence and peer leader program evaluations, were analyzed to provide an in-depth understanding of the peer leader programs implemented at the two colleges.

## **Key Findings**

- **Peer leaders at both colleges offered additional academic assistance to students by introducing and reinforcing lessons covered in class and by helping their faculty partners facilitate classroom activities.**

Both peer leader programs primarily call for peers to help students from their assigned classrooms gain a deeper understanding of course content and engage in classroom activities. SI Leaders and Peer Mentors are expected to attend all classes of their assigned course throughout the semester and consult with their faculty partners to determine how they should go about working with students during class time. These peer leader programs were developed based on research connecting this kind of support among “status equals” with increases in students' collaborative and active learning skills.

- **Program staff and faculty members recruited and selected peer leaders who had strong academic and interpersonal skills.**

Faculty members and administrators at both colleges recruited peer leaders informally, encouraging students who seemed a good fit for the program to apply. These students often had previously succeeded in the course. Other potential candidates were identified through their roles as tutors in academic resource centers or as leaders in student organizations. When selecting peer leaders, program administrators said that they looked for students who combined strong academic habits with personal qualities such as maturity, listening skills, and facilitation

skills. Additionally, peer leaders at both colleges were paid, creating a strong incentive for them to participate and take the role seriously. As both colleges scaled up their programs, they engaged more people on campus in efforts to recruit peer leaders and provided more extensive training for them.

- **The specific tasks and functions of peer leaders inside and outside the classroom varied according to the expectations of assigned faculty members.**

While the roles and responsibilities of peer leaders all involved helping other students succeed academically and acclimate socially, peer leaders had a variety of tasks, depending on how instructors chose to incorporate them into the classroom. For example, some peer leaders' responsibilities during class included working with students in small groups, walking around the classroom to offer individual assistance, and co-facilitating class discussions. SI Leaders' tasks during SI sessions and Peer Mentors' roles outside the classroom also varied to some degree, but for the most part they centered on providing customized assistance to individual students that was more difficult to offer in the classroom. Although most peer leaders were well integrated into the courses, there were a few instances in which they seemed underused because faculty members were not sure how to use their peer leaders or were hesitant to involve them.

Even though SI Leaders and Peer Mentors serve all students in their assigned classes, there was an added emphasis on reaching out and providing extra assistance to the students who were struggling the most. Administrators and faculty members at both colleges continued to assess whether their most "at-risk" students were receiving help from peer leaders, and if not, to strategize about how to effectively engage more students to take advantage of the interventions.

- **Students in peer-assisted courses generally felt that they benefited from peer leaders' guidance and support, particularly because it came from fellow students.**

Overall, students who were interviewed said that they appreciated the additional academic support provided by peer leaders, who were described as welcoming, accessible, and generous with their time. Students reported that peer leaders were willing to review course material as many times as necessary and led interactive discussions focused on students' concerns to supplement or expand on the material that faculty presented. Students further suggested that assistance from peer leaders was distinct from what administrators or faculty members could provide, specifically because it came from fellow students. Students reported that peer leaders presented the course material from a student's perspective, which aided their understanding. Moreover, peer leaders felt that empathizing with students and sharing their own experiences and hardships helped students build a level of trust and credibility that was more difficult to foster with a faculty member or professional adviser.

- **Research by the colleges' Institutional Research staff suggests that peer leaders helped students at Bunker Hill persist in college and helped students at Northern Essex complete developmental and gatekeeper math courses.**

Although determining whether or not peer leaders directly increased persistence and improved academic performance for students in developmental or gatekeeper courses at these two colleges was beyond the scope of this report, both colleges have made strides to collect program participation and course data to better understand the extent to which student outcomes are affected by peer leaders. Researchers at Northern Essex and Bunker Hill collected and analyzed basic quantitative student outcomes data and found that higher course completion and retention rates were associated with students whose courses had assigned peer leaders, compared with students whose courses did not have peer leaders. Northern Essex found that, overall, students in SI Leader sections of developmental and gatekeeper math courses completed these courses at higher rates than students in the same courses whose sections did not have SI Leaders. Similarly, students enrolled in first-year seminars at Bunker Hill were more likely to reenroll the following semester if their seminar was served by a Peer Mentor.

- **Both colleges have expanded their peer leader programs across sections and disciplines, prompting them to establish more program standards and practices.**

Bunker Hill and Northern Essex recognized a need to establish guidelines and expectations as their programs expanded and new faculty and peer leaders became involved. As a result, both colleges expanded the use of peer leaders to more sections, as well as across new courses and disciplines beyond those that initially offered the peer leader component. This expansion prompted Northern Essex to standardize program procedures; more structured training is being provided to SI Leaders and faculty members to ensure consistency in faculty and peer leader roles. In order to further standardize the program, Bunker Hill also developed a more formal training program to establish clear learning objectives for Peer Mentors.

- **College administrators generally saw the programs as affordable and cost-effective.**

Administrators at both colleges viewed employing peer leaders as a relatively cost-effective way to offer academic support and guidance. Some administrators considered peer leader programs a more cost-effective alternative to hiring full-time faculty to provide similar services, or to purchasing costly teaching resources and materials that do not offer the same level of individualized help as a person placed in a classroom. Even though the peer leader programs supported students both inside and outside the classroom, the programs did not require substantial amounts of funding. Estimated costs for the peer leader programs in the



2011-2012 academic year were \$87,000 at Northern Essex and \$93,000 at Bunker Hill; in the 2010-2011 academic year, the programs served approximately 450 and 800 students respectively. Both programs were primarily supported by institutional funding.

## **Conclusion**

The incorporation of peer leaders into institutional efforts to increase the success rates of students in developmental and gatekeeper courses can be important in providing struggling students with the assistance they need to successfully pass these courses and continue working toward a college degree. As seen in these two case study colleges, peer leaders can play integral roles in helping other students learn and effectively use the services at their disposal, while the programs can simultaneously give these peer leaders valuable experiences as educators and as campus leaders — experiences that will benefit their own educational and career trajectories. Community colleges interested in creating or improving peer leader programs may find value in the experiences of these two colleges in meeting the operational and fiscal challenges of developing and expanding these programs.



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

The growing number of students seeking an accessible, low-cost higher education has led to surging enrollments at community colleges nationwide. Student enrollments at these institutions grew an estimated 15 percent between fall 2008 and fall 2010 alone.<sup>1</sup> Community college students have also become more diverse, requiring these institutions to address a broad range of student needs. Low tuition rates and open admissions at community colleges have attracted many students who are academically underprepared and must take developmental (remedial) education courses — in which they are taught basic English and math skills needed for success in college — before they can go on to college-level courses.

Passing through the developmental education sequence can be difficult for many students. In fact, most students who are in need of remediation generally do not end up persisting to college-level courses in English or math, let alone completing the requirements needed to eventually graduate or transfer. Fewer than half of students referred to developmental education courses complete the entire developmental course sequence.<sup>2</sup> Community colleges are exploring new teaching and learning approaches to help this larger, more diverse student population pass through developmental education courses and go on to succeed in the college curriculum. One promising approach is to recruit and train students who have successfully completed developmental courses — and have a solid mastery of course content — to help their fellow students as “peer leaders.” Colleges hope and expect that peer leaders can help to engage students who would otherwise feel lost or uninterested in their classes and provide additional academic assistance in a cost-effective way at a time of budget cuts.

### About This Report

This report highlights how two Massachusetts community colleges — Northern Essex Community College and Bunker Hill Community College — employ academically successful students to help other students in need of extra assistance in developmental and gatekeeper (that is, introductory college-level) courses. These two colleges use academically successful students as “peer leaders,” a term used in this report to refer to both Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leaders in developmental math classes at Northern Essex, and Peer Mentors in first-year seminar

---

<sup>1</sup>American Association of Community Colleges (2011).

<sup>2</sup>Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2009). This finding comes from an analysis of data from over 250,000 students attending colleges participating in Achieving the Dream, a national initiative aimed at improving outcomes for community college students.

courses at Bunker Hill. These case studies also show how administrators and faculty members use peer leaders to contribute to the everyday classroom learning environment in these courses and discuss the considerations and challenges the colleges have faced in developing peer leader programs. The Boston Foundation provided support for MDRC to conduct the case studies in order to better understand the progress colleges were making in implementing innovative strategies and improving developmental education. The case studies highlight some of the innovative work taking place in two of the Massachusetts colleges that are participating in Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a national initiative designed to help community colleges make better use of research and data to improve student outcomes (see Box 1.1).<sup>3</sup>

Some studies suggest that having peer leaders accessible during class time may be especially important at community colleges, where commuter and part-time students do not have as many opportunities as full-time students to develop meaningful relationships with academically motivated student role models.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the increased popularity of the use of peer leaders as a strategy to improve student success in low-achieving courses also calls for a closer examination. Specifically, this report addresses the following research questions:

- How and why did these colleges select SI and Peer Mentoring as strategies to address their needs in developmental education?
- How did these colleges select peer leaders, design their programs, and incorporate peer leaders into their curricula?
- What efforts have the colleges made to evaluate the influence of SI and Peer Mentoring on rates of completing developmental and gatekeeper courses and on rates of retention in college?
- What decisions have been made to scale up these strategies?

Institutional researchers at Northern Essex and Bunker Hill Community Colleges have found that SI and Peer Mentoring programs have led to improvements in student outcomes on their campuses and have made progress in bringing their programs to scale. This report examines their accomplishments and challenges and draws lessons for other community colleges that may be considering or adopting similar strategies to boost students' success.

---

<sup>3</sup>The other two Massachusetts community colleges participating in Achieving the Dream are Roxbury Community College and Springfield Technical Community College.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Minor (2007).

### **Box 1.1**

#### **Achieving the Dream**

Achieving the Dream, Inc. is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Evidence-based, student-centered, and built on the values of equity and excellence, Achieving the Dream's goal is to close achievement gaps and accelerate student success nationwide by: (1) guiding evidence-based institutional change, (2) influencing public policy, (3) generating knowledge, and (4) engaging the public. Conceived as an initiative in 2004 by Lumina Foundation and seven founding partner organizations, today Achieving the Dream works with 160 community colleges and institutions, more than 100 coaches and advisers, and 15 state policy teams in 30 states and the District of Columbia.

## **How and Why the Colleges Were Chosen**

In February 2011, MDRC issued an interim report on the implementation of Achieving the Dream at 26 community colleges in five states: Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. One of the key recommendations made in this report was for more colleges to focus efforts on developing classroom approaches to help students to gain a deeper knowledge of course content, as well as to better understand what makes their “successful students” successful.<sup>5</sup> The report indicated that although colleges instituted a wide range of strategies, many of them also faced a number of challenges in scaling up intensive strategies; the benefits of “promising” strategies were frequently extended only to a small number of students.

In 2007, a consortium of funders in Massachusetts<sup>6</sup> provided support for four community colleges in the state to participate in the Achieving the Dream initiative. Led by the Boston Foundation, this consortium expressed interest in understanding more about how Achieving the Dream has made a difference at the colleges, particularly in informing policy and practices that affect student success. The Massachusetts colleges also provided an opportunity to study what some Achieving the Dream colleges are doing to improve students' academic performance in developmental education classes and how they are trying to scale up these efforts.

In 2010, MDRC began a two-phase study of these colleges, with the first phase focused on the implementation of Achieving the Dream principles and strategies at the four community

---

<sup>5</sup>Rutschow et al. (2011).

<sup>6</sup>The Boston Foundation, the Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation, the Irene E. and George Davis Foundation, and The Education Resources Institute (TERI).

colleges in Massachusetts<sup>7</sup> — in particular, how these colleges have gone about implementing strategies in developmental and gatekeeper courses. While all four Massachusetts Achieving the Dream colleges showed some positive progress toward implementing innovative curricular and pedagogical practices and support services, data from Northern Essex and Bunker Hill, in particular, showed progress in improving teaching and learning practices in these colleges' developmental and gatekeeper courses. Moreover, both colleges had successful students serve as peer leaders in classrooms as a way to bolster student learning and course completion efforts in developmental and gatekeeper courses. For these reasons, Northern Essex and Bunker Hill were selected for Phase II of the study, a more comprehensive case study of their peer leader strategies.

## **Institutional Profiles**

Table 1.1 provides information on the student bodies at Northern Essex and Bunker Hill colleges, including data on total enrollment, gender, race/ethnicity, full-time status, developmental education placement rates, and graduation rates. At both colleges, part-time students and women form a majority of the students, and most students who enroll are in need of developmental education courses.

### **Northern Essex**

Northern Essex Community College is located in the suburbs of northeastern Massachusetts, about an hour north of Boston. The college serves over 7,000 students at a main campus in Haverhill and an additional campus in Lawrence.<sup>8</sup> Over the past decade, Northern Essex's student body has become increasingly diverse, and in 2002 the college became the only one in the state to be designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The college's Hispanic student population now makes up over one-quarter of the student body. The majority of students at Northern Essex are women (62 percent); the average age is 25 for daytime students and 31 for evening students.

The need to address the underpreparedness of a large portion of students at the college is made clear by the number of those who were assessed into developmental-level courses. As Table 1.1 shows, the majority of students who went through the assessment process at Northern Essex during academic year 2010-2011 placed into a developmental math course, and nearly one-third were assessed to take a developmental English course. According to administrators at

---

<sup>7</sup>Phase I of the Massachusetts Achieving the Dream study, conducted by MDRC, took place during the 2009-2010 academic year and included both case study colleges highlighted in this report.

<sup>8</sup>Northern Essex Community College Institutional Research records (2011).

**Massachusetts Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count**

**Table 1.1**

**Selected Characteristics of Northern Essex Community College (NECC)  
and Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) Students, Fall 2010**

Characteristic	NECC Students	BHCC Students
Total enrollment (N)	7,439	12,271
Full time (12+ credits) (%)	38	33
Part time (%)	62	67
Enrollment by gender (%)		
Female	62	56
Male	38	44
Enrollment by race/ethnicity (%)		
Black/African American	4	25
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	1
Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	13
Hispanic/Latino	28	17
White	60	33
Other/Unknown	7	11
Students placing into developmental education <sup>a</sup> (%)		
Mathematics	55	56
Reading	26	25
English/Writing	30	40
Transfer-out rate <sup>b</sup> (%)	26	20
Graduation rate <sup>b</sup> (%)	13 <sup>c</sup>	11 <sup>d</sup>

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS); NECC institutional data; BHCC institutional data.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup>NECC placement percentages are calculated for all 2,178 applicants who went through the assessment process in academic year 2010-2011; not all applicants became NECC students. BHCC placement percentages are calculated for all 2,504 first-time-in-college students in the fall 2010 entering cohort. Distributions do not add to 100 percent because categories are not mutually exclusive.

<sup>b</sup>Transfer-out and graduation rates are calculated for full-time, first-time degree- or certificate-seeking students who began their studies in fall 2007 and graduated or transferred to another institution within 150 percent of the "normal" time to completion, as defined by IPEDS.

<sup>c</sup>At NECC, 19 percent of full-time, first-time students who began in fall 2006 graduated within 200 percent of the normal time to completion, and 32 percent of entering students were full-time, first-time students in 2010.

<sup>d</sup>At BHCC, 17 percent of full-time, first-time students who began in fall 2006 graduated within 200 percent of the normal time to completion, and 33 percent of entering students were full-time, first-time students in 2010.

the college, only a fraction of students who enrolled in developmental courses — especially math — ultimately passed the courses, and even fewer went on to earn certificates or degrees.

As part of Achieving the Dream, Northern Essex Community College has implemented an “umbrella” of strategies aimed to increase rates of course completion and persistence in developmental and college-level mathematics. The college has made strides to gradually scale up SI, an academic support program that offers student-to-student assistance during class and regularly scheduled voluntary study sessions outside of class. SI sessions are facilitated by SI Leaders, who are Northern Essex students who have shown significant content knowledge in the particular subject area. Most of the SI Leaders previously took the developmental math course themselves and demonstrated both good study skills and mastery of the main concepts.

### **Bunker Hill**

Bunker Hill Community College’s main campus is centrally located in the Charlestown neighborhood of Boston, with five satellite campuses sprawled across the city. The college’s enrollment has grown exponentially over the last 10 years, and is continually growing at a rate of about 7 percent a year.<sup>9</sup> The college now serves over 12,000 culturally diverse students, with about two-thirds of students attending part time.

Bunker Hill’s demographic data show that over half of its students are students of color. The college also enrolls around 700 international students from almost 100 countries. Half of Bunker Hill’s students are over 25 years of age, although full-time students are typically younger than part-time students. The average age for a full-time student is 25, whereas the average age for a part-time student is 30.

As is the case at Northern Essex, Bunker Hill also has a considerable number of students who come to the college underprepared to tackle college-level coursework. Data from the college on first-time-in-college students in the Fall 2010 term indicate that over half of these students placed into a developmental math course, and well over one-third placed into a developmental English course.

In order to address the underpreparedness of its incoming student population, Bunker Hill has over the last five years gradually developed and institutionalized seminar courses for first-year and developmental education students. Each seminar course is structured around an academic or life-experience theme, and the curriculum includes information about campus resources and study skills. Unique to the college’s enhanced seminars are Peer Mentors, who help faculty members convey lessons and content through the student lens and are accessible

---

<sup>9</sup>Bunker Hill Community College Institutional Research records (2011).



outside of class to provide additional support. Peer Mentors are typically second-year students who have taken the first-year seminar course and have an interest in returning to the course to assist the instructor who taught them.

## **Two Models of Peer Leadership: Supplemental Instruction Leaders and Peer Mentors**

Before describing in more detail the two community college peer leadership models featured in this report, it is important to explain the general structure of each model, as well as general similarities and differences between the two models. Both models were developed by educational experts outside of the colleges, but were adapted and customized to suit the colleges' needs. Table 1.2 outlines the main features of the SI program at Northern Essex and the first-year seminar Peer Mentor program at Bunker Hill, and what it means to be a peer leader in each program.

SI was created in 1973 at the University of Missouri-Kansas City to address the institution's high student attrition rate.<sup>10</sup> Since then, SI has become a widely adopted method for providing additional academic practice and assistance in developmental and college-level courses.<sup>11</sup> The strategy generally involves assigning students who have performed well in a course or have demonstrated mastery of the material to work directly with students and an instructor in that particular course. Students serving as Supplemental Instructors — or “SI Leaders” — help other students to integrate the study skills and understanding of content material that they need to successfully complete the course. SI Leaders generally work with students from their assigned courses during regular class time and lead additional weekly study sessions, where they facilitate discussions and exercises aimed at increasing mastery of content and encouraging collaborative learning. Research has associated SI with increased learning skills, increased feedback about academic performance, and increased collaborative and active learning interaction among students.<sup>12</sup> SI is a widely used strategy at many Achieving the Dream colleges in a variety of developmental and entry-level courses that typically have high failure rates.<sup>13</sup>

The Peer Mentoring model that Bunker Hill adopted for its first-year seminar courses was drawn from national research conducted by Betsy Barefoot and John Gardner on the first-year experience in college. According to program coordinators, these researchers found that incorporating Peer Mentors into first-year courses is one of a range of interventions that can

---

<sup>10</sup>See University of Missouri-Kansas City (2011a) for more information about the program.

<sup>11</sup>Arendale (2002).

<sup>12</sup>Arendale (2002).

<sup>13</sup>Rutschow et al. (2011).

**Massachusetts Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count**

**Table 1.2**

**Main Features of Peer Leader Programs**

		<b>Supplemental</b>	
		<b>Instruction Leaders</b>	<b>Peer Mentors</b>
<b>Program Description</b>	Assist with classroom activities	sometimes	X
	Hold sessions outside of class	X	sometimes
	Talk with students about personal problems		X
	Tutor students on content	X	sometimes
<b>Program Influences</b>	University of Missouri-Kansas City	X	
	Betsy Barefoot and John Gardner		X
<b>Selection</b>	Application process	X	X
	Faculty/staff recommendations	X	X
	Interview	sometimes	X
	GPA requirement		X
	Personal essay		X
<b>Training</b>	Meeting at beginning of semester	X	X
	Two-day orientation		X
	Biweekly meetings		X
	Bimonthly meetings	X	
<b>Compensation</b>	\$10.00 per hour		X
	\$12.50 per hour	X	
<b>Interactions with Faculty</b>	Structured set of activities		
	Faculty and peer leader decide what is best	X	X

work in concert to improve first-year student outcomes. While Peer Mentoring may take on various forms in different educational settings, in general Peer Mentors have the opportunity to interact with other students in more relevant ways than instructors or student services staff, which can make it easier for students to disclose needs, worries, or personal problems that might be affecting their academic performance. Peer Mentors can also steer collaborative learning, student-led discussions, and self-reflective “lessons learned” to supplement cognitive learning. Some studies also have explored the effects of structured, classroom-based Peer Mentoring on increasing familiarity with the college institution and on access to campus resources,<sup>14</sup> suggesting that Peer Mentors provide “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals...who are not professional teachers, helping each other learn and learning themselves by so doing.”<sup>15</sup>

The two models have many common components. For instance, both models call for the peer leaders primarily to help students from their assigned classrooms gain a deeper understanding of course content and engage in classroom activities, such as small-group projects. Peer Mentors and SI Leaders are also asked to help students identify individual challenges that

<sup>14</sup> Minor (2007); Topping (2005).

<sup>15</sup>Topping (2005).

may impede their academic success and offer students information about campus services that can offer them additional resources. SI Leaders and Peer Mentors are expected to attend all classes of their assigned course throughout the semester, and both consult closely with their assigned faculty partner to determine how they each should go about working with students during class time. Another common aspect of the two programs is that neither SI Leaders nor Peer Mentors are expected to serve as traditional “teaching assistants” or co-instructors in their assigned classes. This means that they do not perform tasks such as grading coursework or exams, teaching lessons in the absence of their faculty partners, or changing lesson plans or classroom assignments.

There are also some distinctions between the two models. For instance, SI Leaders are required to facilitate two hours of lab time outside of class with students who voluntarily come and seek additional course help. Peer Mentors, however, are not required to facilitate additional class sections, although many hold office hours outside of class, sometimes for individuals or sometimes for groups. While the main emphasis of support by SI Leaders is to reinforce content knowledge and test preparation, Peer Mentors take more holistic approaches to student support that can include talking through emotional problems with students, giving candid advice about courses and instructors, or walking students around campus.

For SI Leaders, mastery of course content and effective teaching styles are key, while for Peer Mentors in first-year seminars, familiarity with campus resources and effective group facilitation skills may be more applicable competencies. In addition, the structure of each model calls for somewhat different kinds of interactions between students and peer leaders. SI Leaders’ interactions with students are largely determined by how their instructors want to integrate the leaders into their classes; some SI Leaders have an active role in both the regular class and the SI study session, while for others the interactions are mainly confined to the SI session. Bunker Hill’s Peer Mentors, however serve as part of a larger support structure within their first-year seminars, thus making their roles in and out of class more dependent on how they fit in with the other supports and the faculty teams embedded in the seminars.

## **Methodology**

The case studies in this report are based on an analysis of data collected from field visits and program reports from Northern Essex and Bunker Hill over a two-year period starting in early 2010. The case studies derive primarily from multiple interviews and focus groups with key peer leader program stakeholders at the colleges and evaluation data collected and analyzed by the colleges. The first step in developing the case studies was a new analysis of the 2010 Phase I field visit findings, conducted as part of the larger Massachusetts Achieving the Dream evaluation, which helped identify these two colleges as developmental education case study sites for this report. After a comprehensive review of Phase I research field notes and Achieving the

Dream data reports, the MDRC research team determined that of the four Achieving the Dream colleges in Massachusetts, Northern Essex and Bunker Hill were further along in having developed methods to collect and analyze data on the strategies they had implemented in developmental education and gatekeeper courses.

Next, a three-person MDRC research team conducted two-day site visits at each college to learn more about the challenges and successes of their implementation, and the connection these strategies had to colleges' plans for developmental education reform. For each college, MDRC researchers interviewed administrators and faculty and conducted focus groups with peer leaders and with students who were enrolled in peer leader classrooms (for example, in SI courses at Northern Essex and first-year seminars at Bunker Hill).<sup>16</sup> The researchers audio-recorded and took extensive notes on all interviews and focus groups.

Before and after site visits, the researchers reviewed the institutional data findings that the colleges reported in their Annual Narrative and Report submissions to Achieving the Dream; during the visits the researchers discussed additional intervention data reports with college leaders. After the site visits, program coordinators and the college's researchers received follow-up phone calls and e-mails to further clarify information about program components and the results from earlier institutional data the colleges had collected about their interventions.

Unlike many MDRC studies that use a random assignment methodology to assign sample participants to either a program group or a control group in order to measure the impact of an intervention, this report primarily relies on extensive qualitative interview data and, to a lesser extent, on data collected by the institutions on the development and progress of their reforms. Therefore, it should be noted that findings from this report are not experimentally derived program impacts, and thus should be interpreted as suggestive rather than causal proof of program effectiveness. Earlier MDRC studies on Achieving the Dream have also used this methodology to inform the field about how the initiative has contributed to colleges' implementation of student success strategies.<sup>17</sup>

## **The Organization of This Report**

The following chapters of this report describe the implementation of SI and Peer Mentoring in community college classrooms in more detail. Chapter 2 focuses on describing the structure and development of the SI program at Northern Essex Community College; the experiences of SI Leaders, faculty members, and students as part of that development; and how the institution is evaluating the program in order to improve and expand its reach throughout the campus.

---

<sup>16</sup>The number of students in focus groups ranged from 5 to 20.

<sup>17</sup>Zachry and Orr (2009); Rutschow et al. (2011).

Chapter 3 explores the incorporation of Peer Mentors into first-year seminar courses at Bunker Hill Community College, how these mentors interact with faculty partners and students in the classroom, and the steps the college has taken to scale up and formalize its Peer Mentoring program. The final chapter examines the implications of these colleges' experiences, including implications for implementing the programs at other colleges and key considerations that other institutions should take into account when planning and implementing their own peer leader programs.



## Chapter 2

# Supplemental Instruction at Northern Essex Community College

This chapter provides a description of the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program at Northern Essex. It begins with a brief history of the evolution of SI and its growth since the program's inception in 2009, followed by an explanation of the program's structure and operations. Next, the chapter describes the selection process and preparation that SI Leaders receive, presents the findings culled from qualitative interviews and focus groups with faculty and students, and describes data provided by the college on program outcomes and costs. The chapter concludes with a summary of the college's future plans for scaling up and improving SI.

## Introduction

Students' low completion and persistence rates in mathematics courses — both developmental and college-level — have long been an institutional challenge at Northern Essex and have produced significant academic achievement gaps between students of color and white students.<sup>1</sup> To address this challenge, the college began its Achieving the Dream tenure by planning and piloting several math initiatives,<sup>2</sup> including its SI model. As described earlier, SI is an academic support program that offers student-to-student assistance during class and regularly scheduled voluntary study sessions outside of class. Northern Essex adopted the model in 2009, after a math faculty member attended a workshop on SI. He returned to Northern Essex with plans to pilot the college's first SI course in one of his college algebra classes. After a short search, he recruited a student who had successfully completed the math course and, in the eyes of the faculty member, was highly competent to serve as the first SI Leader. The faculty member's new knowledge of and enthusiasm for SI garnered the math department's support, and soon the number of SI math courses grew steadily from semester to semester.

Figure 2.1 illustrates how Northern Essex has steadily scaled up its SI course offerings since their launch in the Spring 2009 semester, when the first and only SI course was offered at the college. By the Spring 2011 semester, the college had increased to 15 SI course sections, and since the inception of the strategy, roughly 600 students have had an SI Leader in one of their courses.

---

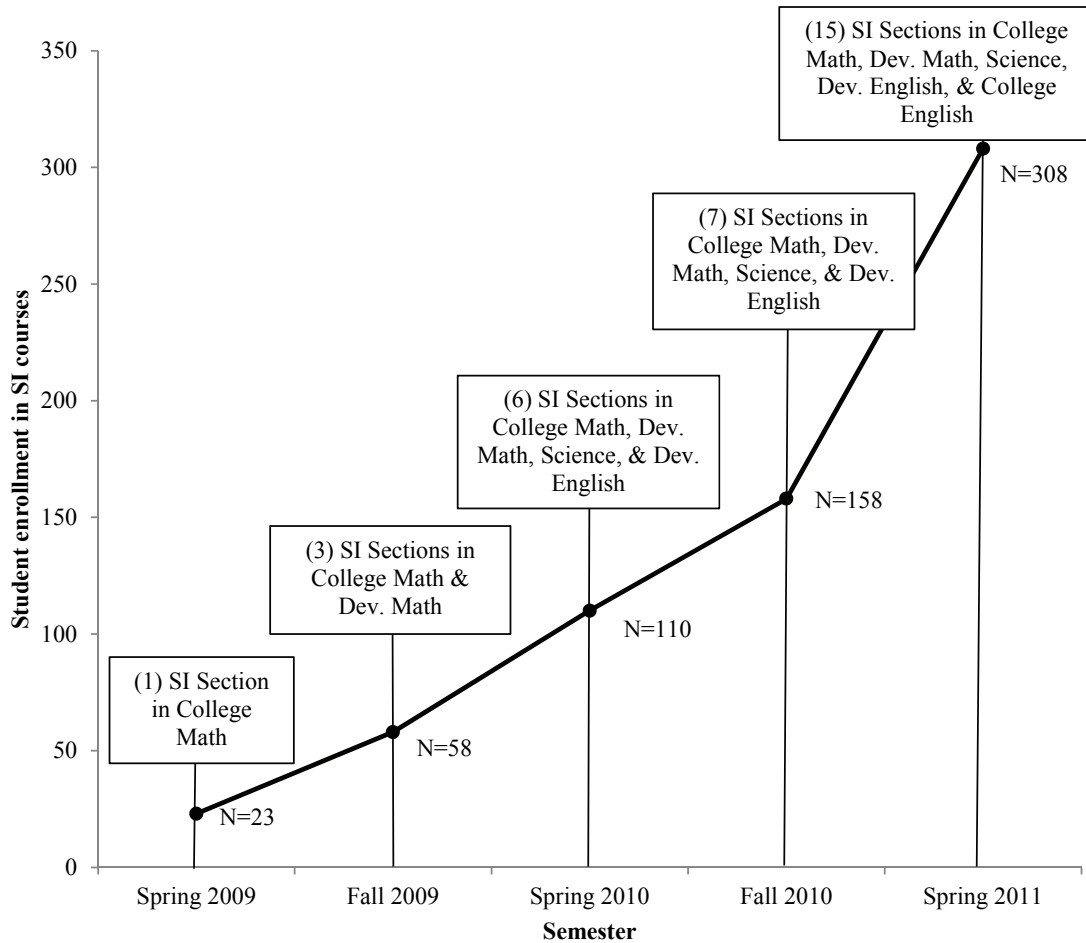
<sup>1</sup>Northern Essex Community College (2009).

<sup>2</sup>As part of Achieving the Dream, Northern Essex's overall strategy to help increase rates of student success in math included the creation of a new Math Lab, the development of alternative methods of delivering instruction, a comprehensive curriculum review, and additional faculty professional development.

Massachusetts Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count

Figure 2.1

Program Scale-Up for Supplemental Instruction (SI) Sections  
Northern Essex Community College (NECC), Spring 2009 to Spring 2011



SOURCE: Course enrollment counts generated from NECC's institutional database.

### Program Structure

As noted, SI aims to increase students' academic performance by providing an SI Leader who offers additional guidance in and outside of the classroom. SI Leaders guide students through difficult concepts introduced by their instructor and provide an environment for students to ask specific questions that they may not feel comfortable raising during regular class time. SI Leaders have two main responsibilities: (1) to attend all class periods of their assigned classes and offer students assistance when called upon and (2) to hold SI sessions for at least two hours



per week to allow students to further discuss course material or practice exercises that help reinforce content learning. (See Box 2.1 for a profile of an SI Leader.)

SI Leaders' attendance at all class periods allows students to get to know their leader and encourages them to converse and ask questions. By attending each class, SI Leaders also observe first-hand what course material the instructor is covering and the areas in which students experience difficulty or confusion. Subsequently, during the separate session, the SI Leader knows which areas to focus on.

The majority of SI sessions outside of class are held directly before or after the class period or broken up into one-hour blocks on two different days. Students who enroll in the course are not required to attend the session, which is viewed as an added service for those who feel they need extra help. Some faculty members encourage their students to attend SI sessions by offering extra credit, but others feel that the optional nature of the sessions is a key element of the SI strategy.

Initially, the Dean of Foundational Studies and Liberal Arts and Sciences at Northern Essex oversaw the SI program and was responsible for recruiting the faculty members who incorporate SI Leaders into their classrooms. In 2010, as cross-departmental interest in SI grew, college administrators felt it was crucial to hire a coordinator to organize and manage the activities of the SI Leaders and program. The SI Coordinator, supervised by the Assistant Dean of Libraries and the Academic Resource and Tutoring Center, now oversees the SI program and works with departmental deans and faculty to select SI courses. The coordinator recruits, hires, and trains SI Leaders; handles payroll logistics; helps match SI Leaders with classes and teachers; and helps to resolve any day-to-day conflicts that arise in the program.

## **Recruitment, Selection, and Training**

Recruitment of SI Leaders has been somewhat of an organic process, according to one administrator. The typical recruitment approach has been for faculty members and current SI Leaders to encourage students who have previously enrolled in the course and demonstrated mastery of its content to apply as SI Leaders the following semester. Many of the recruited SI Leaders have previously taken the course with the instructor whom they go on to work with as SI Leaders and they have usually earned an A or B+ grade in the course.

When the program first launched, faculty members hand-selected SI Leaders whom they thought they would be a good fit for the program. Now, however, Northern Essex has shifted to a mixed recruitment model, under which the SI Leader is sometimes a former student who has taken the course, but may also be a Math Center tutor who has not taken the course. This combination of selection methods has allowed Northern Essex to expand the pool of students whom the institution believes are qualified to become SI Leaders.

### Box 2.1

#### **Peer Profile: Andy, Supplemental Instruction Leader, Northern Essex Community College**

Well before becoming the first Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leader at Northern Essex, Andy remembers “[hanging] out in the Math Center doing homework almost every day.” Given his natural ability in mathematics and his outgoing personality, it is not surprising that a staff member in the Math Center recommended him for the college’s first SI course in College Algebra. Andy had recently completed Calculus I, and thought that becoming an SI Leader could help him build upon his already strong math foundation.

During the class period with the instructor, Andy mostly paid attention to the lesson that was being taught. He conversed with the teacher weekly, usually while the students were settling in for the class. Although he was never asked to solve problems during class, sometimes he provided suggestions if he thought of an alternate strategy to solve a problem, thus giving students a way to think about different approaches to solving the problem.

The majority of Andy’s SI Leader responsibilities came during the biweekly SI sessions he led. He describes the sessions: “Most of the time I would start the session off by asking if anyone had any questions. Usually [on] Monday morning students haven’t thought about math all weekend. My job was to first get their attention...by asking about how their weekend was, or [telling] them a story about my weekend....Once I have their attention I engage them by presenting two or three problems at a time, have them work them out for a couple of minutes and then ask if someone would walk through the problem on the board....My job was to provide a place where the students felt comfortable making mistakes.”

Fostering a place where students felt comfortable sometimes posed a challenge for Andy, who had to balance “being the head of the classroom, but also being a peer to them.” Yet most students were more comfortable coming to Andy with questions because he was their peer, not an instructor. Andy felt the most rewarding part of being an SI Leader was teaching students who felt they weren’t good at math, or have “always hated math.” He felt that when these students understood a concept, they were often more eager to learn than students who always did well in math. When asked what suggestions or advice Andy would give to college administrators who want to start a SI program on their campuses, his answer was straightforward: “What are you waiting for?”

After becoming a SI Leader, Andy began tutoring in the Math Center and held both peer leader positions for the two years he was enrolled at Northern Essex. He recently graduated with an associate’s degree in Engineering Science with a mechanical focus. Following graduation, Andy did research at Northeastern University over the summer and planned to attend the University of Massachusetts-Lowell in the spring semester of 2012.

Given that the program is expanding, the college decided to implement an informal interview process to assess prospective SI Leaders whom the SI Coordinator does not know personally. Aside from selecting students they know will be reliable throughout the semester, faculty and the SI Coordinator said they look for leaders with certain interpersonal qualities, which include an outgoing personality, solid listening skills, an ability to articulate difficult course material easily, and an understanding of different learning styles or approaches.

Initially, determining the best way to use the SI Leader in class was left to the SI Leader and faculty member to decide. However, once the program began expanding to more sections and different disciplines, program leaders recognized a need to further establish SI Leader guidelines and expectations, both for the peer leaders and for the faculty members to whom SI Leaders were assigned.

Beginning in the Spring 2011 semester, program leaders began distributing the “SI Leader’s Guide” from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where SI originated, to all SI Leaders and faculty members. In addition, SI Leaders attend a two-hour orientation session where they complete paperwork, go through the Leader’s Guide, and discuss different scenarios that might arise during SI sessions. The Leaders also meet with the program coordinator to discuss their work two or three times per semester.

## **Program Interactions and Perceptions**

### **Interactions Between SI Leaders and Students**

Students enrolled in SI courses and interviewed in focus groups said that having SI Leaders in classes gave them extra support, particularly in math courses. One student explained that when she found it difficult to keep up with lectures involving new algebraic terms and formulas, she could always turn to her SI Leader, who would come over to explain material. Another student added that, “In my class, our SI will come over if you need help. She is not hovering over you; you need to ask her to come over, but she’ll explain anything.” One more student noted that even when he did not initiate a request for help, his SI Leader walked over to talk with him when it looked like he was having problems grasping the content being presented in the class.

Students explained that during their SI sessions, SI Leaders reviewed challenging course material as many times as necessary. These students further said that they were given opportunities beyond the ones offered in the math class to ask customized questions or attempt different math problems on the board until they understood the material. One student explained, “It’s easier and it’s a one-on-one in a group setting. It’s not just being talked at; it’s being talked to.” SI Leaders who manage 15 to 20 students in a session typically facilitate larger discussions about course material, whereas sessions consisting of two to five students give the SI Leaders an

opportunity to work individually with each student. SI sessions were also described as interactive and focused on addressing student concerns. As one student described it, “The SI picks problems that seemed difficult in class out of the book or a sample test, and we’ll go through those until everyone gets it.” Students said they responded positively to this approach, since it varied from the structure they experienced in the classroom.

Students found going to the SI Leader for help was often more convenient than going to the instructor, as the SI Leaders were flexible and willing to meet with students at times other than the allotted session time. One student noted that going in for extra help with professors is difficult because sometimes the office hours do not work with students’ schedules, whereas she can meet with the SI Leader at a time that she is available. Since many SI Leaders also serve as Math Center tutors, students could set up various times in the Math Center to work one-on-one or in small groups of students from their assigned courses. One student explained, “We have SI after class, but also you can go to the Math Center and [the SI Leader] will be there.”

SI Leaders interviewed agreed that they offered a different view of the material and the ability to be a peer rather than an instructor. They felt the ability to relate as a fellow student was vital to their role. As one SI Leader said, “The teacher has their way and you can offer your own way. You can build a personal connection with students and figure out how these students learn, and you can better their learning because you have that peer connection.” SI Leaders also said that they were willing to adapt to the students’ preferences and learning styles, taking into account areas of difficulty based on the class discussion.

One SI Leader explained that he asks students many questions during the SI session, to “get their brains going, to see if I can spark their minds to come up with their own solutions.” It is clearly important for SI Leaders to understand the subject material, but it seems equally imperative that they have the appropriate public speaking and social skills needed to be in a teaching-focused role. One SI Leader described how he organizes and guides the SI session according to what he thinks will most benefit the student: “I like to show them how to use the book. A lot of students buy the \$150 book and never open it...In SI, I’ll say, ‘Everyone get your book out.’...In class, the book is used much less.”

### **Interactions Between SI Faculty and SI Leaders**

The way in which SI Leaders are used in the classroom varies across instructors and is largely based on how much instructors plan to integrate SI Leaders into their lessons. Most faculty members interviewed felt the SI Leader was a useful resource for their students during class time. As instructors review course material, some SI Leaders move around the classroom to provide individual assistance to the students who find it difficult to keep up with the lecture. One SI Leader noted that since this had been his first year with the instructor, he initially just observed the class. “Then after a week or two went by, [the instructor] asked if I could go

around...[The instructor now] likes me to walk around and make sure everybody is getting it and everybody's doing the work.”

In contrast, a few instructors did not call upon their assigned SI Leader during the class period<sup>3</sup> and, similarly, did not share information about which students struggled in class or about student grades on assignments. For some instructors, it was important to keep the explanation of the course material consistent. Therefore, as the instructor conveyed ideas and explanations during regular class time, the SI Leaders were instructed to reiterate those same ideas during the SI sessions, albeit using a more “student-friendly” vernacular. One instructor explained, “The way I handle SI Leaders is that they don’t teach anything new; they just reinforce what we’ve already gone over. Maybe since they’re closer in age they can present it [from] a student point of view, instead of from a faculty member, [who is also busy] trying to manage the classroom.”

Although some SI Leaders do not play an active role during class time, instructors sometimes carve out specific tasks for them to undertake during the SI session. For instance, some instructors encourage their SI Leaders to offer practice quizzes so students become more comfortable with test taking. Others prefer that the SI Leader focus on important skills that the instructor does not have time to cover in class. For example, they have SI Leaders help students learn how to operate calculator functions — a skill considered a crucial foundation for mastering many basic mathematics courses, but perhaps not one that the instructor has sufficient time to discuss in detail during the lecture period.

There was also some uncertainty, especially among instructors newer to SI, about the best way to use the SI Leaders in the classroom. In some instances, new instructors — especially adjuncts — are focused on learning how best to carry out a course curriculum and may not have the time to figure out the best way to integrate a SI Leader into the delivery of that curriculum. One adjunct instructor who was asked to teach a SI algebra course for the first time said: “When you first start SI, it’s hard to conceptualize exactly what it’s supposed to be. You have to kind of modify what you’re going to do in the classroom if you’re actually going to use [the SI Leader]...They’re not a student, not your equal, but they’re something in between.” This reaction, however, seemed to be more the exception than the rule, as other SI Leaders characterized their roles as clearly defined and discussed with their assigned instructors. One SI Leader noted that she has regular meetings with her assigned instructor about what she should be doing in class, adding that “there is an open dialogue and we work together nicely.”

---

<sup>3</sup>This is a more typical approach of the University of Missouri-Kansas City Model. See University of Missouri-Kansas City (2011b).

## Data Collection and Analysis

One element of Achieving the Dream's ongoing efforts to make institutional improvements in participating colleges' operations is collecting and analyzing data — procedures viewed as key to better understanding the extent to which student outcomes are affected by the intervention. Northern Essex administrators and researchers who were interviewed said that SI had become “one of the more successful strategies” they had encountered since they joined the initiative. When the college examined how well students in SI courses fared compared with students in similar courses without SI Leaders, administrators were encouraged to find that, in general, pass rates for math classes were higher for classes with SI Leaders in them. (See Figure 2.2.)

Of course, Northern Essex's Institutional Research Department and college administrators understand that these data have notable limitations. For example, the voluntary nature of the SI sessions makes interpretation of the data more complicated, because a comparison of pass rates in SI courses versus non-SI courses is a comparison of the class completion rates as a whole. Since a majority of the students in the SI courses are not even attending the SI sessions regularly, it seems unlikely that the observed differences in pass rates are due to SI alone. For example, it may be that the faculty members who incorporate SI into their classrooms are better instructors to begin with, or that the students who are actually attending the SI sessions are more academically motivated and are only doing so to receive the highest grade possible. As the college continues to refine data collection efforts for this program, a more rigorous research design could be helpful in understanding which students are benefiting most from this intervention.

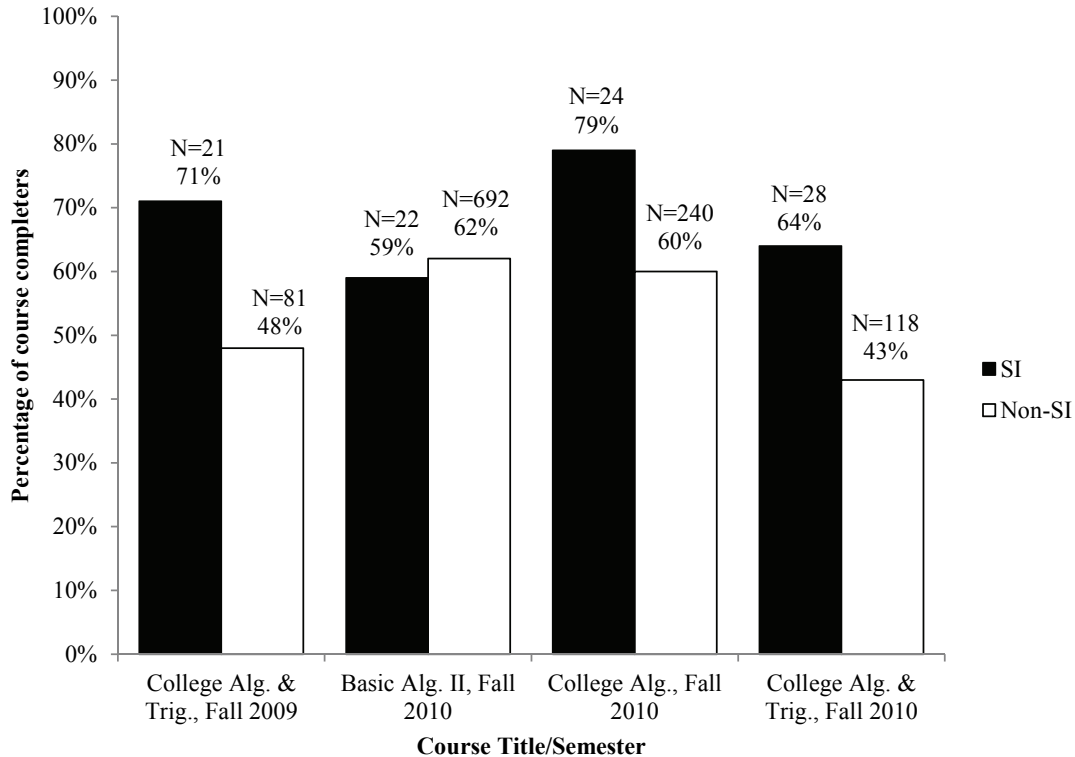
SI Leaders have only begun to be incorporated into courses in other disciplines, such as developmental writing and gatekeeper science courses, and early pass rate data reported by the college in the non-math SI courses already indicate varied outcomes. For instance, SI courses in gatekeeper biology and chemistry and developmental writing have yet to produce the same positive pass rates that the college has found in SI math courses. Therefore, it is too soon to tell if Northern Essex's SI program model will translate to these disciplines and produce the consistent positive findings that have thus far characterized the math courses.

Both for internal recordkeeping purposes and to respond to instructors' interest about who is attending the SI sessions, the college has taken steps to improve the accuracy of attendance records for SI sessions. Beginning in spring 2011, SI Leaders have kept track of the names of students enrolled in the course and their level of engagement. For each student, they note whether the student attended and rate the student's level of engagement (on a scale from 1 to 3) based upon their observation of each student during the session. The college intends to use these data to inform the SI Coordinator about attendance rates and to share the data with instructors who would like to understand how students are using the sessions.

## Massachusetts Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count

Figure 2.2

### Student Course Completion, Sections With and Without Supplemental Instruction (SI) Northern Essex Community College (NECC), Fall 2009 and Fall 2010



SOURCE: Course completion data generated from NECC's institutional database.

## Program Costs

Northern Essex administrators and program leaders estimate that the aggregate cost of running the SI program at Northern Essex is around \$87,000 for the 2011-2012 academic year; in the previous academic year, about 20 course sections served an estimated 450 students. When Northern Essex first implemented SI, the program was funded through a combination of Achieving the Dream resources and a National Science Foundation grant. After the first semester, the college gradually shifted to institutional funds and now sustains most of the program through internal resources. This cost figure includes SI Leader compensation, trainings for faculty and SI Leaders, and the salary of the half-time SI Coordinator.

The foremost cost for the program is employing the SI Leaders and Coordinator. During the first few semesters of the program, students received a \$1,000 stipend at the end of each

semester in which they served as SI Leaders. As the program expanded, however, college administrators decided to determine a fair hourly rate. At the start of the Fall 2011 semester, each of the 22 SI Leaders received \$12.50 per hour for working up to eight hours per week during the semester. Generally, about \$500 per semester is budgeted for SI Leader trainings.

Administrators recognize the need to expand the program carefully and thoughtfully so that it remains sustainable and cost-effective for the college, while still addressing students' needs. One administrator at Northern Essex gave a cost-related rationale for expanding the program: "If [additional] students in every SI session pass...and stick around one semester, maybe two, first of all, it improves their success personally. It improves our course completion, retention, graduation, and transfer rates, and that's revenue to the college."

## **Challenges and Next Steps**

While the SI program is perceived as a promising intervention that program stakeholders feel helps make a difference in student learning, there have also been challenges to growing the program to its fullest potential. For instance, the majority of students in the focus group had their SI sessions scheduled directly after their course met, which they generally found helpful, since they were able to reinforce what they had just learned in class while it was still fresh in their minds. But while a number of focus group participants said the sessions were useful, there were some concerns about attendance. A few students said that their SI sessions only had two or three students on average. Some SI Leaders also expressed concern that attendance rates were very low. SI Leaders and faculty pointed to students' busy schedules as one possible reason for low attendance at SI sessions. To accommodate students who are unable to attend the regularly scheduled sessions, some SI Leaders provide assistance outside of these sessions. As discussed, since many SI Leaders also work as Math Center tutors, they sometimes schedule one-on-one or small group sessions with SI students in the Math Center. SI Leaders and faculty suggested that low attendance at SI sessions may also be because some students did not make attending the voluntary sessions a priority. In general, faculty expressed a need for some sort of incentive to increase attendance at SI sessions; most felt it should be mandatory to an extent but understood the difficulty with implementation, because mandatory SI sessions would require adding course hours, which would thus increase the amount of course credit.

There was also some concern about SI expansion relative to the pool of qualified SI Leaders. Faculty felt it would be difficult to find more SI Leaders with the correct skill set, proper content knowledge, and ability to provide meaningful feedback on students' work. On the one hand, faculty believed that one way to have more qualified SI Leaders would be to increase the training and preparation they receive. They recommended that SI Leaders meet weekly, with formal trainings scheduled for them two or three times a semester. Faculty members suggested additional training topics, such as reviewing problem-solving strategies,



learning how to explain the material, and discussing situations in which SI Leaders were unsure what to do. On the other hand, SI Leaders were not particularly open to the idea of more formal training. Their fear was that the training would make them more like professors, which was the opposite of what they were trying to achieve. Despite this concern, beginning in spring 2012, Northern Essex is planning to increase the training session from two hours to five hours, so that the SI Coordinator can model learning strategies and study skills that SI Leaders can share with students during SI sessions.

As the program continues to expand, faculty and administrators are encouraging other faculty to consider using SI Leaders as part of their courses. But in order to prevent any confusion or mishandling of the role, this change requires a clear articulation of the program's expectations of how faculty should use their SI Leaders. As one adjunct faculty member recalled when she received word that her course had been assigned a SI Leader (an assignment that was made because she had replaced another faculty member who could no longer teach the course), "I have very limited exposure and I'm still trying to work out the optimum way to use the SI component in the class." This faculty member expressed a desire to learn about ways she could involve the SI Leader more effectively, since she was "on the learning curve, trying to figure out: How should I use her? What should I let her do? What shouldn't I let her do?"

In the future, Northern Essex researchers would like to use data to compare outcomes in SI courses and non-SI courses for faculty members who teach both courses. This is another way in which college administrators can learn whether the strategy is contributing to students' success. One administrator noted that controlling for faculty quality is an important step in better understanding whether and how SI Leaders enhance faculty members' efforts in class. For example, he noted one particular SI faculty member who is known for working relentlessly to make sure most, if not all, of her students pass the course, raising the question of whether an exceptional teacher like this one could achieve the same good results without an SI Leader. This type of data analysis can further inform Northern Essex about the potential for expanding the strategy and can help the college determine how the strategy works with different faculty members and across different disciplines. In this way, the college will be able to move forward strategically, using the data to help guide its next steps.

Northern Essex has also developed a Supplemental Instruction Faculty Advisory Board of five instructors with SI experience to make recommendations and address some of the challenges the program is currently facing. This Advisory Board is in the beginning stages, but is an encouraging approach to sharing new ideas based on lessons learned in previous semesters. The encouragement from administrators and faculty exemplifies the strides the college is making to change traditional pedagogical paradigms by incorporating SI Leaders into the classroom as agents of teaching and learning.



## Chapter 3

# Peer Mentoring at Bunker Hill Community College

This chapter provides a description of the Peer Mentoring program at Bunker Hill, which offers support for new students to navigate their first year in college. The organization of this chapter is similar to the one used for Chapter 2: The chapter begins with a discussion of the program's evolution and growth since its inception in 2009. It then describes how the program is structured and operated, how Peer Mentors are selected and trained, and what faculty and students said about the program. These sections are followed by a discussion of data supplied by the college on the program's outcomes and costs. The chapter concludes with a section on the college's future plans for scaling up and improving the Peer Mentoring program.

## Introduction

As part of its Title III-funded<sup>1</sup> “Engaged Campus Initiative” grant awarded in 2006, Bunker Hill has gradually expanded its first-year seminar courses to serve all incoming students. The three-credit seminars are courses required for first-year students who enroll full time. Although these seminars do not have a specific focus on students with developmental education needs, 85 percent of those entering Bunker Hill enroll in at least one developmental education course. As one administrator put it:

The seminar serves students from across the developmental spectrum, challenging faculty to teach to multiple developmental levels while creating opportunities for peer teaching. The centerpiece of the seminar is its role in building quality relationships among faculty, students, and staff.

Currently, students enroll in a variety of seminar courses, each of which explores a different theme that relates to students' everyday lives, experiences, and educational interests. Some seminar courses are designed for students with an interest in behavioral science careers such as psychology or sociology, while other seminars explore, through class discussions and field studies, topics of interest such as gender identity, cultural pluralism, or local history.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Title III provides funds to institutions of higher education to improve and strengthen their academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability.

<sup>2</sup>See Bunker Hill Community College (2011) for a list of all Fall 2011 seminar courses at the college.

All first-year seminars are designed to facilitate a dense “network of support” for first-year students; the network includes access to a Peer Mentor — a seasoned student who shepherds newer students through the academic demands of their college courses and helps them make a smooth transition to campus life. During the design phase of the program, faculty assigned two Peer Mentors to serve in one seminar each. A review of student and faculty survey results from these two seminars yielded compelling positive feedback about how much the Peer Mentors helped students throughout the class, with many students indicating that their Peer Mentors provided valuable help as part of the course. These results prompted the college to employ and train more Peer Mentors for its first-year seminars.

Figure 3.1 reflects the growth of the Peer Mentor program at Bunker Hill since its design phase. By the Spring 2011 semester, 25 Peer Mentors had served 36 first-year seminars at Bunker Hill. The college also plans to expand the program to serve other courses, including its learning community “cluster” courses (in which multiple courses are linked together) and its professional studies courses.

The Peer Mentors at Bunker Hill comprise a diverse group of students of varying ages, ethnicity, and academic majors who view themselves as a bridge between the student and the instructor. Most Peer Mentors have attended Bunker Hill at least one full year, and a few of them occupy other roles on campus, such as being “Cultural Ambassadors”<sup>3</sup> on campus, being involved with student government, or serving as tutors in math, science, or English.

## **Program Structure**

According to the program coordinator, the Peer Mentoring model adopted by Bunker Hill is primarily based on the research of Betsy Barefoot and John Gardner on first-year seminars, which incorporate upper-level students who have successfully completed the seminar and who help to deliver the curriculum to first-year students. In general, Bunker Hill’s Peer Mentors are hired to help students understand course content during class and to help with facilitating classroom discussions and group activities. All Peer Mentors are required to attend every class period during the semester and provide general support for the instructor they are assigned to. Aside from this requirement, however, the roles and responsibilities of Peer Mentors are determined in large part by both the Peer Mentor and the assigned faculty partner, based on the specific theme of the seminar and the needs of the class. While some Peer Mentors may

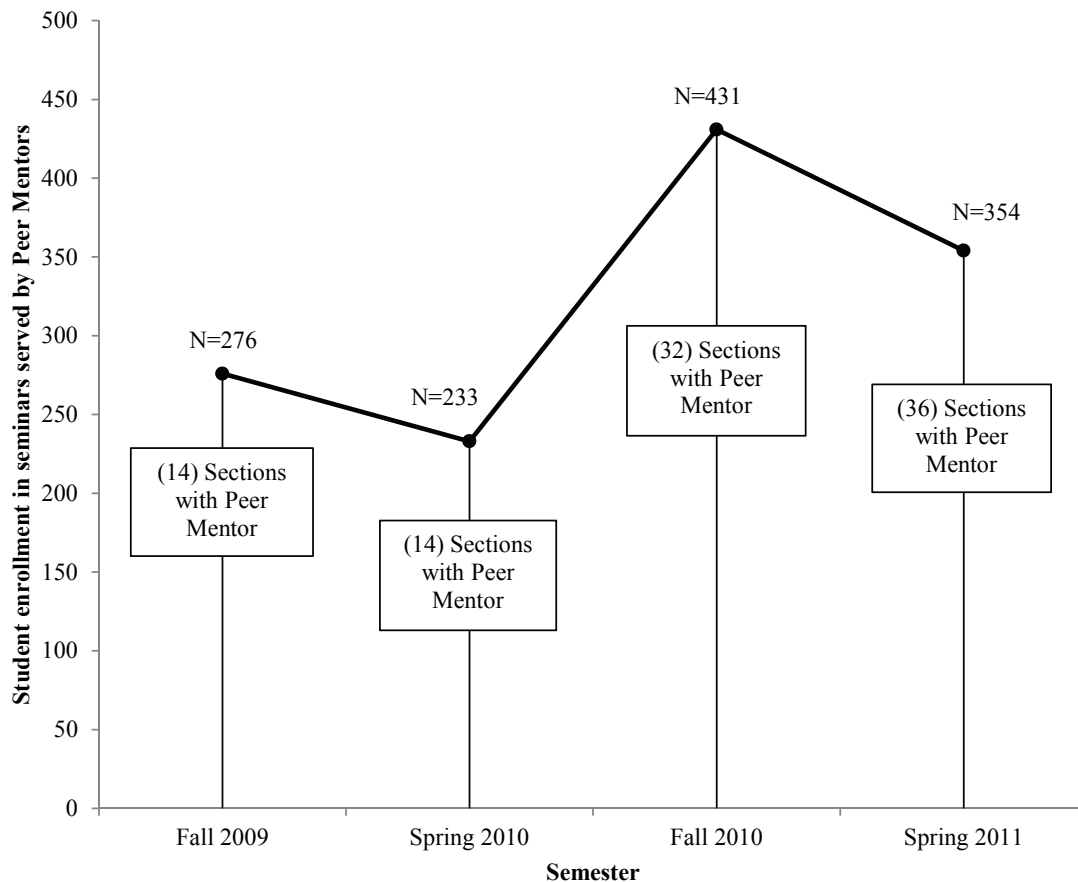
---

<sup>3</sup>The Cultural Ambassadors program was created at Bunker Hill in 2006 to facilitate discussion on campus about issues of race, class, gender, religion, and cultural differences. Cultural Ambassadors attend leadership retreats focused on diversity and inclusion, discussion facilitation, and public speaking. In 2011, the Cultural Ambassador program merged with the Peer Mentor program, so all Peer Mentors currently fill the Cultural Ambassador role.

Massachusetts Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count

Figure 3.1

Program Scale-Up for Peer Mentor Program  
Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), Fall 2009 to Spring 2011



SOURCE: Course enrollment counts generated from BHCC's institutional database.

regularly work with students in small groups and walk around during class to help where needed, others may be given the opportunity to co-facilitate discussions about the topic related to the course lecture. (See Box 3.1 for a profile of a Peer Mentor.)

Peer Mentor roles outside the classroom also vary, ranging from individual tutoring, listening to students' accounts of their personal struggles, or contacting students to remind them about upcoming assignment deadlines or exams. Peer Mentors are allowed to hold office hours for private student-to-student advising and occasionally for tutoring sessions. Peer Mentors in

### Box 3.1

#### **Peer Profile: Keisha, Peer Mentor, Bunker Hill Community College**

Things have not always been easy for Keisha, as she has had to overcome a multitude of barriers to progress to where she is today. The difficult adjustment from high school to higher education as a first-time college student was compounded by losing a parent, living homeless, and withdrawing from courses early in her Bunker Hill education. However, after taking a seminar course, bonding with her instructor, and being recommended as a Peer Mentor, she is now considered to be one of the shining stars at the college — and attributes much of her success to her experience as a Peer Mentor.

Keisha explained that initially she was hesitant about participating in the Peer Mentor program. It took convincing from her instructor that her personable qualities, insight, and devotion to her education made her a natural fit for this type of program. As Keisha explains, “I resisted the idea for a long time because I didn’t think that I would be good at it. At the time I didn’t believe in myself enough — that I was capable [of helping] other students. It was a scary thought.” The instructor didn’t give up and continually encouraged Keisha to try peer mentoring, and after two semesters, she finally decided to apply.

There are many different capacities in which Keisha serves as a mentor. She assists the professor in developing lessons inside the classroom. For example, she describes how she and the professor “spent a lot of time planning the curriculum, and then realized...the curriculum wasn’t working. Then we spent a bunch of time changing it to fit the needs of these particular students.”

Not only does Keisha provide support inside the classroom, but she also talks with students outside of class about an array of problems. Some of these may be minor setbacks, and others shape a student’s future trajectory in college and beyond. Keisha meets with students who want to drop out of school, struggle to balance their workloads, deal with child care issues, or have experienced the death of family members. She feels that her ability to be open with the students about her own personal struggles is what accounts for her successful mentoring relationship with them. She also believes that the students knowing that someone is there for support is a critical aspect of the Peer Mentor program. She adds, “I know that I wish I had a mentor to be like, ‘This is what is going on.’ It makes the load that much lighter, so I’m not constantly thinking about it. Even if this person can’t do something, if they can’t fix it, at least they’re there to listen.”

Keisha has traveled a long road since starting at Bunker Hill Community College. Her work as a Peer Mentor has not only offered students additional support, but also has rewarded her personally by tapping into her potential and opening many doors of opportunity. In 2011, Keisha spent four weeks of her summer at the Institute of Venice, Italy, on a study abroad scholarship.

math-related seminars more commonly play a tutoring role in their seminars, while Peer Mentors in more literature-based seminars usually focus on helping with assigned projects or group work and holding office hours to discuss personal problems in a private setting.

The Dean of Humanities and Learning Communities anchors the overall Peer Mentor program development (and this Dean is also anchoring the new Peer Ambassadors program, which includes Peer Mentoring and which is discussed at the end of this chapter). The Dean is supported by the Assistant Director of Learning Communities, who serves as the program coordinator and is responsible for the management tasks of interviewing Peer Mentor candidates, matching Peer Mentors with faculty, providing training, and supervising the Peer Mentors throughout the semester.

## **Recruitment, Selection, and Training**

The process of recruiting, selecting and training the right students to become Peer Mentors involves various stakeholders at Bunker Hill, from the coordinator in charge of the program to faculty who work with the Peer Mentors in the classroom to staff on campus who help to identify students with the desired qualifications. While the coordinator is now primarily in charge of marketing the program to potential Peer Mentors, one college administrator described the process of recruiting mentors as “homegrown,” meaning that faculty members and current Peer Mentors actively seek out potential Peer Mentors for future seminars. Some Peer Mentors are faculty members’ standout students from their previous seminar; others hear about the program from friends who have served as Peer Mentors. Student services staff also help to identify potential Peer Mentors from students they know who possess a solid understanding of where services and programs are located on the campus or who are actively involved with student organizations and campus events. Campus programs and offices, such as the tutoring centers, have become recruitment hubs for Peer Mentors.

Program leaders who were interviewed stated that they place an importance on employing Peer Mentors who embody, as one program leader put it, “strong academic habits and personal characteristics that they can model for other students in class.” Therefore, students interested in becoming Peer Mentors must first be considered in good academic standing at the college, typically holding an A or B grade point average. Interested candidates must also obtain two faculty recommendations and submit an essay describing specific experiences and qualities that make them the best candidates to provide sound advice and guidance to other students.

Once a pool of potential candidates is identified, the coordinator conducts personal interviews to better assess candidates’ academic qualities, experiences at Bunker Hill, and personal maturity. As the Peer Mentors are selected, the coordinator assigns each to a particular seminar course based on his or her own experience and understanding of a seminar’s theme, the Peer Mentor’s interest in that particular seminar, and whether the time the seminar is offered fits

into the Peer Mentor's own course schedule. Faculty members teaching the seminar courses, especially those who have recruited particular students to serve as Peer Mentors in their class, also have an opportunity to weigh in on how well they feel a candidate would fit into their seminars.

Peer Mentors receive a two-day training before the beginning of each semester. This training covers how to handle certain situations in the classroom and touches on the different ways that Peer Mentors should assist students and faculty partners. The training also provides an overview of tools designed to help students make the successful transition to college, such as information about financial aid, advising, and other campus services. During the semester, Peer Mentors meet regularly to check in on their progress and to discuss any challenges or concerns they face. At these meetings, Peer Mentors also are trained using a curriculum that covers the topics of leadership development, cultural competencies, and conflict resolution and includes a service learning project.

## **Program Interactions and Perceptions**

### **Interactions Between Peer Mentors and Students**

Students interviewed in focus groups about their experiences in seminar courses with Peer Mentors generally seemed to appreciate having a Peer Mentor as part of their class. Most students said that their Peer Mentors were usually generous with their time and demonstrated a willingness to help them understand course material or to expand on what had been discussed in class. Although Peer Mentors' level of interaction with students varied, most Peer Mentors seemed prepared to lead class discussions or facilitate small-group discussions about key points in the instructor's lecture. Some Peer Mentors were described as being "floaters" during class time; they circulate the room to help small groups of students work together on projects, address any of their questions, and encourage equal participation among the group members.

The majority of current Peer Mentors have themselves been enrolled in a seminar, giving students an important reason to rely on and trust the experience that their Peer Mentors brought to helping them understand the seminar themes. Sharing their own experiences and hardships was another way that Peer Mentors connected to students. For one Peer Mentor assigned to a seminar course focused on the urban male experience, this meant posing critical thinking questions to students during class discussions that helped them to relate their understanding of issues such as stereotypes, crime, and sexuality to the Peer Mentor's life growing up in Boston's inner-city neighborhoods. Many of the students interviewed suggested that hearing about their Peer Mentors' "back stories" during class helped them to improve their own learning about how the subject matter or topic of discussion related to their own lives.



Most students agreed that their Peer Mentors were both welcoming and readily accessible outside of class when they needed them. One student who was struggling through her seminar course recalled that she could not understand anything at first, so her mentor helped by sitting with her and guiding her page by page; after a few weekly meetings with her Peer Mentor outside of class each week, the student's work improved and ultimately she earned an A in the course. Helping students with emotional problems was another role many Peer Mentors undertook. One Peer Mentor — an international student who also serves as a Cultural Ambassador on campus — said that many first-year international students at Bunker Hill initially find themselves lonely and without access to local family supports. For him, serving as a Peer Mentor for these students meant being there as “an extra person for guidance and support,” and being that “one person at school who is invested and who cares for them.”

Other students described their Peer Mentors as going above and beyond the call of duty. For instance, it was noted that some Peer Mentors would arrive in class 15 minutes early so that they would be available to address any last-minute student questions before the start of the class. There were Peer Mentors who spoke about making phone calls as early as 6:00 a.m. to remind students about exams and assignment deadlines for that day's class. Other Peer Mentors have gone as far as sharing their cell phone numbers or social network pages with students so that the students, who often work after school and do not start studying until late at night, can get in touch with the Mentors and ask questions at any time.

### **Interactions Between Faculty and Peer Mentors**

Most faculty members who volunteered to have Peer Mentors as part of their seminar courses were enthusiastic and passionate about their work as instructors. Those who taught together in a cluster explained that many resources work together to provide the student with the optimal chance of success. Faculty members who taught seminars with Peer Mentors said that having Peer Mentors facilitate small-group work was one of the most popular ways they incorporated them into their courses. One faculty member described having a native Spanish speaker as his Peer Mentor in a course in which six of his students were Spanish speakers. Since this was a gateway English course, having a Peer Mentor who spoke fluent Spanish bridged the language gap for those students.

Most students felt that the Peer Mentor and the instructor exemplified a good working relationship during class, although a few mentioned not seeing much interaction between the two as part of their seminars. In several instances, students said that they would like their Peer Mentor to play a larger role inside the classroom but that the instructor did not give this opportunity to the Peer Mentor. In these situations, it seemed as if the students were not sure how to best use the Peer Mentor, because the Mentor had not been given enough occasions to interact and build a relationship with them. Some faculty also expressed concerns that they were not

sure of the best way to incorporate Peer Mentors into their lesson plans. One faculty member said, “To be honest, I think we’ve underutilized them.”

Some faculty described gradually building a relationship with the Peer Mentor, especially in instances where they had had the same mentor for more than one semester. In these cases, as the instructor and Peer Mentor continued to work together, the experience became increasingly collaborative. As one instructor said, “The Peer Mentor is giving me more ideas on activities in the class that help bring about the building of a community.” Another faculty member shared the syllabus from the previous semester with the Peer Mentor and worked with the Peer Mentor to make improvements in the syllabus for the upcoming semester.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

As Bunker Hill does with any new program or service that aims to enhance student learning, the college has begun to document the experiences of participants in Peer Mentoring and its success in raising the achievement levels of first-year students. Initially, program leaders and institutional researchers relied primarily on qualitative data to examine the formative stages of the program. For instance, during the program’s design phase (2008-2009) and pilot phase (2009-2010), results from surveys disseminated to students and instructors attached to the peer-mentored first-year seminars indicated overwhelming support for having Peer Mentors inside the classrooms to help first-year students. In-depth interviews with the Peer Mentors and the seminar instructors offered opportunities to learn how the Peer Mentor/faculty partnership could improve inside the class and how Peer Mentors could further engage students both in and out of class. These early findings also prompted discussions of how to select Peer Mentor training topics and of possible curricular design changes for the seminar courses to help further incorporate Peer Mentors into classroom learning activities.

During the expansion stage of the program (2010-2011), program leaders continued to analyze the data derived from first-year seminar students and instructors; they also conducted end-of-semester interviews with the Peer Mentors who planned to continue in their roles in the upcoming semester. Peer Mentors were also asked to begin keeping weekly logs of their mentoring activities and reflections on their mentoring experiences during the semester. These logs were intended to both help inform the program coordinator about their accomplishments and to contribute to a larger qualitative analysis that was being conducted by the coordinator and other faculty and researchers associated with the development of first-year seminars at the college. Program leaders also continually work to find ways to disseminate qualitative findings about the progress of the Peer Mentor program to the rest of the campus community — for example, by giving reports on the program during the college’s annual Faculty Presentation Day.

In addition to the formative qualitative analysis, program leaders have recently begun to work with the college's Office of Institutional Effectiveness to collect and analyze basic quantitative outcomes data relevant to the Peer Mentoring intervention in the first-year seminars. For instance, the college has compared students who took seminar courses with Peer Mentors with students who did not have Peer Mentors in similar courses, and found higher levels of course completion, retention, and classroom satisfaction for students in the seminars with Peer Mentors.

Figure 3.2 compares students enrolled in seminar courses with Peer Mentors with the remainder of Bunker Hill's students and with students in seminar courses without Peer Mentors. During the pilot semester (Fall 2009), only a handful of Peer Mentors had been placed in seminars, and program objectives and responsibilities were yet to be firmly established. Not surprisingly, data from that pilot semester indicated that having Peer Mentors in first-year seminars made little to no impression on students' retention in the following semester. Data in subsequent semesters, however, provide a more encouraging story, as students in first-year seminar courses with Peer Mentors not only have higher rates of returning to school the following semester than the broader Bunker Hill student population, but were also retained at higher rates than students in first-year seminars without Peer Mentors. This indicates a promising early trend. Program leaders hope that these findings will continue, although the detected differences are modest, and outcome data on more cohorts are needed to see whether a clear pattern emerges.

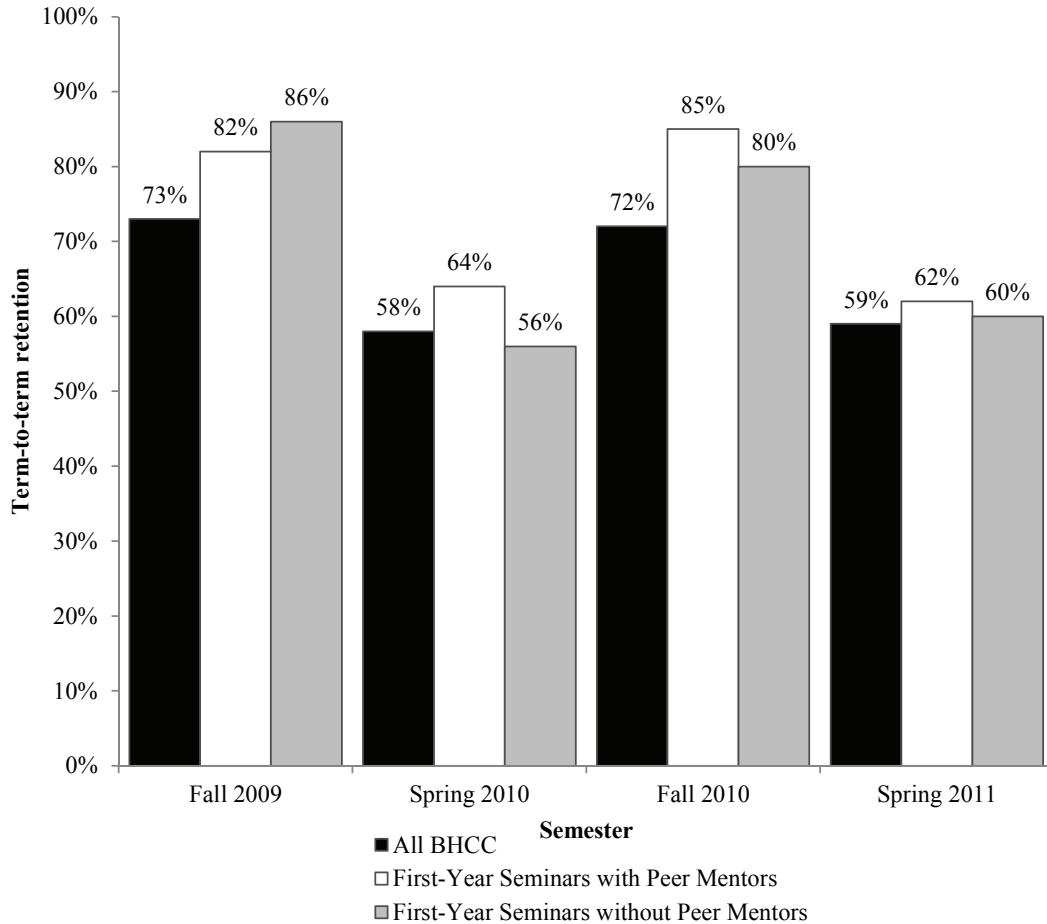
There are notable limitations on future data analyses the college would like to undertake. First, now that seminars are required for first-year, full-time students, there will no longer be a similar comparison group to use to gauge the impact of the Peer Mentors on pass rates in seminar courses. Second, the fact that Bunker Hill incorporates multiple resources into the seminar classrooms makes it difficult to parse out the pure effects that a Peer Mentor has over the other special components of the first-year seminars — for example, the integrated academic and career counseling components. Nevertheless, Bunker Hill leaders believe that it is the use of multiple resources that is creating overall positive student outcomes.

Bunker Hill administrators and researchers plan to continue their initial data collection and analysis efforts in order to better understand both the progress the Peer Mentoring program has made and the potential improvements that they need to make in the program as it moves forward. According to the Director of Institutional Effectiveness, future analyses will also likely cover matched-pair analysis (by race and gender) across all seminars, to better tease out the distinctions in outcomes for different targeted groups. There is also interest in analyzing seminars by theme and different academic disciplines in order to understand which appear to use Peer Mentors most effectively.

Massachusetts Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count

Figure 3.2

Term-to-Term Retention, First-Year Seminars With and Without Peer Mentors  
Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), Fall 2009 to Spring 2011



SOURCE: Retention data generated from BHCC's institutional database.

## Program Costs

The Peer Mentoring program was initially funded by the college's Title III funding to run learning communities. Beginning in 2009, the program was primarily supported by institutional funds, and starting with the 2011-2012 academic year, the program is funded entirely by the college. The Peer Mentoring program coordinator at Bunker Hill described the overall cost of running the program as relatively inexpensive, as her role as coordinator is embedded within her

larger role as the Assistant Director of Learning Communities. Therefore, the aggregate cost of running the Peer Mentoring program primarily consists of stipends and compensation for the Peer Mentors, trainings for Peer Mentors and seminar faculty, and program supplies such as t-shirts and journals — all of which is estimated by program leaders to amount to around \$93,000 for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Peer Mentors are paid \$10 per hour for up to eight hours per week during the semester. According to the coordinator, about half of the Peer Mentors spend four to six hours per week mentoring, and half work the full eight hours every week. Bunker Hill compensates work for most student positions at \$10 per hour, making the Peer Mentor rate consistent with the general student pay ranges on campus. However, following a precedent used in the Tutoring Center — that with experience comes a pay increase — college administrators are discussing the possibility that as the program moves forward, there will be a difference in hourly pay rates for new and more tenured Peer Mentors, who will play a leadership role in the training of new mentors.

## **Challenges and Next Steps**

### **Challenges**

Although the Peer Mentoring program at Bunker Hill is distinct from the SI Leader strategy at Northern Essex, the Bunker Hill program faces some challenges in the areas of implementation and expansion that are similar to those found at Northern Essex. For example, students, Peer Mentors, and faculty at Bunker Hill all reported instances where the Peer Mentor seemed underused. And as seemed to be the case with the SI Leader program, balancing the instructors' academic freedom with the orchestration of Peer Mentoring means that the program must walk a fine line. Another similarity is that the instances when the Peer Mentors seemed to flourish were the instances when they were given the opportunity to do so. Finally, Bunker Hill has ample occasions for faculty involved in Peer Mentoring to come together and discuss their experiences and approaches, but ensuring that all faculty involved (including adjuncts) attend such events can be a challenge. Meeting that challenge may help to promote the overall incorporation of the Peer Mentors into the life of the classrooms to which they are assigned.

The program has a solid foundation and recruitment process, but as its expansion continues, the college will have to continually search for qualified students to fill the Peer Mentor role. Since the responsibilities of Peer Mentors are varied, it seems crucial that the right type of Peer Mentor be paired with the right type of responsibilities. Also, since Peer Mentors sometimes discuss topics as personal as family losses and problems at home, finding applicants with the sensitivity and maturity needed is essential.

## **Next Steps**

In 2011, Bunker Hill made strides to institutionalize its Peer Mentoring program. The college's Action Plan created the Peer Ambassadors Program — a program that integrates the existing Peer Mentoring and Cultural Ambassadors programs. Peer Ambassadors will continue the role of Peer Mentors by providing peer support for students in first-year seminars. The new merged program will also incorporate key aspects of the Cultural Ambassadors program, such as an emphasis on cultural competencies and dispute resolution. Bunker Hill allocated an additional \$8,000 in institutional program funding to implement this program beginning in fall 2011.

Bunker Hill is developing a year-long training program for Peer Ambassadors, known as the Peer Ambassador Academy: Student Success and Intercultural Competencies. The Academy will encompass learning objectives from both programs — for example, strategies for mentoring; for facilitating dialogue about such issues as religion, race, class, gender, and culture; and for dispute resolution. The college expects to enroll 15 new and returning Peer Ambassadors in the Academy during the 2011-2012 academic year, in order to increase the number of students served by Peer Ambassadors in first-year seminars by about 300 students per year. It is also noteworthy that the college is not only increasing seminar course offerings, but has also taken the next step of mandating the courses for all first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students, in order to decrease the risks of course failure and dropout for this student population. In an encouraging development, as the college moves ahead to develop the new Peer Ambassadors program, it is using data to decide where to allocate the program's resources and determine which of its practices are actually effective.

Finally, the college is continually trying to increase faculty engagement with the enhanced course model. Bunker Hill holds an annual professional development event, which is planned and organized by a committee of involved faculty. The 2011 Learning Communities Institute focused on themes of integration, engagement, and reflection, and included a session on peer mentoring. The purpose of the Institute was for faculty and staff to share innovative ideas about critical thinking, collaboration, and student engagement. The Assistant Director of Learning Communities noted that the session on peer mentoring was very well attended, which is a positive sign that those attending were engaged and interested in such a strategy. These efforts are key to increasing faculty awareness of, buy-in to, and engagement with the Peer Mentor strategy.

## Chapter 4

# Summary and Future Considerations

The previous chapters have depicted the experiences of two community colleges that recruit and employ academically successful and campus-savvy students to serve as peer leaders in developmental education and gatekeeper courses. The peer leaders at Northern Essex Community College and Bunker Hill Community College offer additional academic support to students to help them complete courses and become integrated into campus life. Over the past few years, both colleges have carefully implemented and expanded these programs, revealing important ways in which colleges can better use the academic skills and personal qualities of some of their students to help support other students' success.

This final chapter offers insights on the contributions peer leaders appear to have made to efforts to assist students in developmental and gatekeeper courses at these two colleges, and on the ongoing challenges the colleges will likely address as they continually scale up these programs. The chapter also underscores some important lessons learned that may guide other colleges interested in implementing similar peer leader programs on their own campuses.

## The Contributions of Peer Leaders to their Colleges

In general, personnel and students interviewed from Northern Essex and from Bunker Hill about the Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leaders and first-year seminar Peer Mentors, respectively, regard these two peer leader programs as valuable strategies for student-to-student guidance that instructors or campus staff cannot offer. Specifically, administrators and faculty members at both colleges testified that these peer leaders have been able to convey course lessons through the lens of their own experiences, and many of the students in peer-assisted classrooms acknowledged how interactions with their peer leaders have deepened their own understanding of the lessons. The incorporation of peer leaders into courses where many students typically struggle — for example, developmental courses — also seems to have led to expanded use of alternative approaches to traditional pedagogical practices, such as collaborative group work and reflective discussions that encourage students to be engaged in learning. Peer leaders who facilitated these activities offered students an opportunity to identify and solve problems collaboratively and more thoughtfully than might have been the case if they had not had this kind of support. Overburdened faculty members were also able to use peer leaders to fill additional needs in their classrooms.

Peer leaders at these two colleges seemed to have reached as many students outside as inside class. According to students, these more individualized outside-of-class interactions gave them the opportunity to build a level of trust and “credibility” with peers that was sometimes

seen as more difficult to foster with an instructor. SI Leaders were described as being more accessible outside of class than faculty members and were relied upon to convey course content in a more step-by-step manner and more slowly than was the case for in-class instructors. Interactions with Peer Mentors also offered help to newer students to acclimate themselves to campus or to become more involved with campus programs and services.

The experience of acting as role models seemed to also benefit the peer leaders themselves, as it provided opportunities for personal, professional, and academic growth. A fundamental benefit built into both peer leader models is that these positions offer gifted students paid employment, which for many meant financial relief and an on-campus job that is relatively flexible and convenient to get to.

Serving as classroom peer leaders also gives students who have already been performing at high levels opportunities to master new challenges. For some students, becoming a SI Leader or a first-year seminar Peer Mentor may have been the first time they were placed in a position of teaching or guiding others, which meant learning to convey difficult concepts or ideas to others. And some students interested in the teaching profession viewed the experience as an opportunity to develop a closer rapport with their faculty partners, many of whom served as professional mentors, giving them valuable feedback about how to become better educators.

At the institutional level, both colleges have viewed employing peer leaders as a relatively cost-effective way to offer students academic support and guidance. For some administrators, these programs are considered cost-effective alternatives to hiring full-time faculty to provide similar services or to purchasing costly teaching resources and materials that do not offer the same level of individualized help as a person placed in the classroom. One administrator said that the investment his college makes in peer leaders “eventually pays itself back,” as peer leaders help more students to complete courses that they would not have otherwise passed and to enroll in subsequent semesters, which increases revenue to the college.

## **Considerations for Future Program Development**

As SI and Peer Mentoring continue to evolve at Northern Essex and Bunker Hill, there are opportunities to build on the lessons learned from their early development in order to strengthen the interventions and maximize the effectiveness of peer leaders. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, both colleges are aware of the challenges to maintaining and growing their peer leader programs — challenges that other community colleges with interests in developing peer leader programs can and should consider. These challenges and considerations range from the appropriate recruitment and training at the program level, to proper practices and procedures at the classroom level, to the larger operational and financial considerations at the institutional level.



## **Considerations for Recruitment, Selection, and Training**

Expanding the qualified pool of applicants is something both colleges recognized as an area for further consideration. As these peer programs continue to grow, the two colleges are implementing stronger recruitment, selection, and training procedures for finding the right candidates to enter the program and grooming them to effectively work with faculty members and students. Certainly, the pool of interested applicants will grow as these colleges scale up their programs and thus expand their marketing to fill these paid, on-campus positions. As a result, determining the desired characteristics and skill sets of future peer leaders can help program leaders select qualified candidates.

Very likely a large share of the pool of candidates will continue to be made up of students from classrooms that already use peers, where current peer leaders and faculty members can readily identify potential candidates based on their class performance and demeanor. Increased communication between academic and student services departments may also open up opportunities to find candidates, especially those who are gifted in different areas of study or who are active in student-led organizations and campus programs. Academically strong students can be recruited from campus honors programs, associated student councils and committees, and organizations that focus on cultivating student leaders and that serve the needs of specific student populations — for example, cultural or gender-based clubs or clubs focused on spiritual issues. Finally, it may prove valuable for programs to seek out students who have successfully made the transition from developmental to college-level courses to serve as peer leaders in developmental-level courses. These students will not only be able to share their academic knowledge but also may be able to convey what it has taken for them to persist and perform successfully. However, regardless of the value of finding peer leaders who can share their experiences with students, it should be standard practice to assign peer leaders to courses that match their academic skills and knowledge, in order to ensure that they are teaching or reinforcing material they understand.

The process of selecting peer leaders can also benefit from having more current peer leaders and faculty members conduct interviews of candidates — a practice that both Bunker Hill and Northern Essex have already started to use. Potential peer leaders need to have not only appropriate academic competencies, but also outgoing personalities and the ability to speak to fairly large audiences. These skills may be easier to identify in an interview setting or by having potential applicants give short presentations. Integrating current peer leaders into the selection process opens up the opportunity for them to ask questions about how potential applicants would best approach and engage students or handle tense situations. In addition, interviews or mock presentations can give instructors who plan on having peers in their classrooms an initial sense of how well versed and mature potential applicants seem to be. At the same time, inter-

views give instructors an opportunity to convey what the candidates should expect in working with them during class.

On the topic of training, the transition between peer leaders and faculty members understanding expectations and actually carrying them out may not be automatic or seamless. Therefore, it is important for peer leaders and faculty members — especially those who are new to their roles — to be able to observe and possibly shadow more experienced peer leaders and faculty members as they interact with each other and work with students. Because some peer leaders and instructors at both colleges have had difficulty determining the best way to incorporate peers into the classroom, seeing experienced peer leaders and faculty interact with students first-hand gives potential candidates a chance to observe different ways in which instructors and peer leaders can work together. These kinds of observations also give the candidates an opportunity to decide if they are, in fact, willing to assume the responsibilities of peer leadership and to engage in the kinds of interactions the role involves.

Providing opportunities for professional development of faculty and peer leaders would also aid in the training process. Faculty at Northern Essex welcomed the opportunity to come together to discuss best practices and current techniques, and holding more open forums for faculty to come together may be useful to the program. At Bunker Hill, sharing ideas and brainstorming new ways to incorporate the Peer Mentor into the classroom may help newer faculty develop a starting plan for Peer Mentor activities. Similarly, at Northern Essex the trainings should continue to provide opportunities for faculty members new to the strategy to hear about how more experienced faculty members have used SI Leaders as part of their classroom activities and how they have instructed them to support students outside of class.

### **Considerations for Roles and Responsibilities**

Developing clearer program guidelines that clarify expectations can be helpful to making sure peer leaders, faculty members, and students understand their roles as part of the program. However, some peer leaders expressed concerns that placing too much emphasis on program standards and regulations can endanger the autonomy they have been given to determine how best to work with their faculty partners and reach out to struggling students. Therefore, it is important for program leaders to include both peer leaders and their assigned faculty members in processes designed to develop these guidelines, asking them to draw on their experiences of working together. This process of developing guidelines should include working with seasoned peer leaders to help determine what works best for them in helping the most at-risk students, while still allowing for flexibility to have peer leaders act “like students” in order to maintain equal grounding with the students they help. Faculty members and peer leaders should also have the opportunity to weigh in on any proposed larger programmatic changes made in roles and responsibilities if and when such changes are considered.

In connection with the consideration of the roles and responsibilities of peer leaders, there are also concerns about which types of students use these peer leaders and how well faculty have tapped their peer leaders' potential. Even though SI Leaders and Peer Mentors are meant to be available to serve all students from their assigned classes, there is an added emphasis on reaching out and providing extra assistance to the students who are struggling the most, especially those in developmental courses. Administrators and faculty members at both colleges continue to ask and assess whether their most at-risk students are taking advantage of these peer leaders during and outside of class and, if not, how to effectively engage more of them to do so. Some have argued that when students are given the option to voluntarily use academic support and assistance, those most likely to do so are already academically motivated, while other less-motivated students do not take as much advantage of these resources. Some students who were interviewed pointed out that even when they want to get help from their peer leaders outside of class, they usually do not have the extra time to do so, given their competing work or family responsibilities. Therefore, close consideration should be given to finding ways in which peer leaders can more proactively approach the students who are in most danger of failing or dropping out — for example, by engaging them during or immediately after class. Consideration should also be given to finding ways that peer leaders can use e-mail, phone, or social media to be more accessible to the hard-to-reach students who may not have extra time to spend on campus.

### **Considerations for Program Evaluation**

As part of the Achieving the Dream initiative, Northern Essex and Bunker Hill were encouraged to have faculty and staff work in tandem with institutional researchers to collect data to inform decision making on ways to improve their programs and services for students. As a result, institutional researchers and program leaders at both colleges have made great efforts to collect and discuss early program data, semester by semester, making simple comparisons between students who are in peer-assisted courses and students taking comparable, non-peer-assisted courses. Most notably, early quantitative data gathered by the colleges suggest that students exposed to peer leaders as part of their courses tend to have a better chance of completing a math course (as is the case for Northern Essex), or of persisting into the following term (as is the case for Bunker Hill). Gathering qualitative data about program experiences and suggestions for refinement has also become a common practice in the program improvement processes of the two colleges.

Moving forward, both colleges plan to track more detailed program data. For example, Northern Essex plans to keep regular attendance logs for the voluntary SI sessions in order to get a better sense of which types of students actually attend these peer-led sessions, and whether the sessions are reaching students most in need of assistance. Bunker Hill Peer Mentors have begun keeping weekly mentoring logs of their interactions with students from their assigned

seminars as a way to help faculty members and program staff remain aware of common obstacles or challenges first-year students face. The colleges' efforts to examine institutional data on these interventions are an encouraging and important step toward making appropriate decisions for scaling up and refining these programs. The colleges may also use these data to examine student progress and dig deeper to find out whether their interventions are targeting and touching the students they were intended to reach.

Further data collection and rigorous research design can inform the colleges about the extent to which peer leaders can affect students' abilities to pass difficult courses. For instance, much would be learned by assessing how much students in peer-assisted courses also receive similar assistance — for example, through regular campus tutoring, extra time spent with faculty during office hours, or in general advising or counseling sessions. While it may initially be difficult to separate out which interventions influence students the most, colleges could conduct participant surveys or focus groups to ask students how much they use other services available to them and what, if anything, peer leaders offer that makes a difference to their academic and personal success. Finally, ongoing collection of longitudinal data on participants who have successfully completed SI and first-year seminar courses can inform the colleges about how many have progressed from developmental-level and gatekeeper courses to advanced study courses, and into graduation or transfer status. Analysis of longitudinal data can also increase understanding of what conditions in classrooms make the classrooms best suited to benefiting from peer leader services.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of peer leader programs at Northern Essex and Bunker Hill reveals innovative ways in which colleges can enhance student learning and engagement in community college classrooms. Specifically, this report highlights the ways that SI and Peer Mentoring programs have offered distinctive approaches to promoting student success:

- Additional academic and social support for students and faculty members both in and outside of the classroom.
- Student-to-student learning that reinforces course content in developmental and gatekeeper courses and in first-year seminars.
- Academic and professional-growth opportunities for peer leaders as educators and campus representatives.
- Low-cost campus strategies that have the potential to reach a larger portion of the student population, targeting those most in need or most at risk.

As seen in this report on the two case study colleges, peer leaders appear to play integral roles in helping other students learn and use the services at their disposal. Moreover, the use of peer leaders may positively influence the colleges' capacities to keep students on track to pass developmental courses and continue in their efforts to earn college degrees. The way in which the programs support the personal development of peer leaders also offers valuable opportunities for them to emerge as educators and campus leaders — experiences that will benefit their own educational and future career trajectories. Community colleges interested in creating new peer leader programs or strengthening the ones they have already established may find value in these promising peer leader strategies at Northern Essex and Bunker Hill Community Colleges.



**Appendix A**

**Interviews and Focus Groups Conducted at  
Northern Essex Community College**





## **Senior Administrators**

- Current College President; Achieving the Dream Core Member Leader
- Former College President
- Dean of Foundational Studies and Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Assistant Dean of Academic Preparation
- Director of Institutional Effectiveness; Achieving the Dream Data Team Leader

## **Faculty Members**

- Faculty involved with Supplemental Instruction (focus group)
- Faculty responsible for developing and leading Supplemental Instruction strategies
- Faculty involved with mathematics developmental education strategies (focus group)

## **Student Services Staff Members**

- Supplemental Instruction Coordinator
- Math Center Coordinator and staff members

## **Students**

- Supplemental Instruction Leaders (focus group and individual interviews)
- Students enrolled in courses with Supplemental Instruction Leaders (focus group)



**Appendix B**

**Interviews and Focus Groups Conducted at  
Bunker Hill Community College**



## **Senior Administrators**

- College President; Achieving the Dream Core Team Leader
- Associate Vice President of Student Services and Dean of Students; Co-Chair of the Achieving the Dream Initiative
- Dean of Humanities and Learning Communities
- Director of Institutional Effectiveness; Achieving the Dream Data Team Leader

## **Faculty Members**

- Faculty involved with Peer Mentoring (focus group)
- Faculty responsible for developing and leading Peer Mentoring strategies (individual interview)
- Faculty involved with mathematics developmental education strategies (focus group)
- Learning Community Faculty Research Board (focus group)

## **Academic Affairs Staff Members**

- Assistant Director of Learning Communities

## **Student Services Staff Members**

- Success Coaches (focus group)

## **Students**

- Peer Mentors (focus group and individual interviews)
- Students enrolled in courses with Peer Mentors (focus group)



## References

- American Association of Community Colleges. 2011. "Fast Facts." Web site: <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/fastfacts.aspx>
- Arendale, David. 2002. "History of Supplemental Instruction (SI): Mainstreaming of Developmental Education." Pages 15-28 in Dana Britt Lundell and Jeanne L. Higbee (eds.), *Histories of Developmental Education*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, General College, Center for Research on Developmental Education and Urban Literacy.
- Bailey, Thomas, Dong Wook Jeong, and Sung-Woo Cho. 2009. "Referral, Enrollment, and Completion in Developmental Education Sequences in Community Colleges." CCRC Working Paper No. 15. New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Bunker Hill Community College. 2011. "Learning Community Seminars for New Students." Web site: [http://www.bhcc.mass.edu/lc2011/lcs\\_new\\_students.html](http://www.bhcc.mass.edu/lc2011/lcs_new_students.html).
- Minor, Frankie D. 2007. "Building Effective Peer Mentor Programs." Pages 57-69 in Barbara Leigh Smith and Lee Burdette Williams (eds.), *Learning Communities and Student Affairs: Partnering for Powerful Learning*. Olympia, WA: The Evergreen State College, Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education.
- Northern Essex Community College. 2009. "Summary Report on Achieving the Dream." Unpublished report. Haverhill, MA: Northern Essex Community College.
- Rutschow, Elizabeth Zachry, Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Thomas Brock, Genevieve Orr, Oscar Cerna, Dan Cullinan, Monica Reid Kerrigan, Davis Jenkins, Susan Gooden, and Kasey Martin. 2011. *Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges*. New York: MDRC.
- Topping, Keith J. 2005. "Trends in Peer Learning." *Educational Psychology* 25, 6: 631-645.
- University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2011a. "The International Center for Supplemental Instruction." Web site: <http://www.umkc.edu/cad/si/>
- University of Missouri-Kansas City. 2011b. "Overview of Supplemental Instruction." Web site: <http://www.umkc.edu/cad/si/overview.shtml>
- Zachry, Elizabeth, and Genevieve Orr. 2009. *Building Student Success from the Ground Up: A Case Study of an Achieving the Dream College*. New York: MDRC.





## EARLIER MDRC PUBLICATIONS ON ACHIEVING THE DREAM

### *Turning the Tide*

#### *Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges*

2011. Elizabeth Zachry Rutschow, Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Thomas Brock, Genevieve Orr, Oscar Cerna, Dan Cullinan, Monica Reid Kerrigan, Davis Jenkins, Susan Gooden, and Kasey Martin.

### *Investing in Change*

#### *How Much Do Achieving the Dream Colleges Spend — and from What Resources — to Become Data-Driven Institutions?*

2010. Elizabeth M. Zachry and Erin Coghlan with Rashida Welbeck.

### *Terms of Engagement*

#### *Men of Color Discuss Their Experiences in Community College*

2010. Alissa Gardenhire-Crooks, Herbert Collado, Kasey Martin, and Alma Castro with Thomas Brock and Genevieve Orr.

### *Collaborating to Create Change*

#### *How El Paso Community College Improved the Readiness of Its Incoming Students Through Achieving the Dream*

2010. Monica Reid Kerrigan and Doug Slater.

### *Guiding Developmental Math Students to Campus Services*

#### *An Impact Evaluation of the Beacon Program at South Texas College*

2010. Mary G. Visher, Kristin F. Butcher, and Oscar S. Cerna with Dan Cullinan and Emily Schneider.

### *Building Student Success From the Ground Up*

#### *A Case Study of an Achieving the Dream College*

2009. Elizabeth Zachry and Genevieve Orr.

### *Achieving the Dream Colleges in Pennsylvania and Washington State*

#### *Early Progress Toward Building a Culture of Evidence*

2009. Davis Jenkins, Todd Ellwein, John Wachen, Monica Reid Kerrigan, and Sung-Woo Cho.

### *Faculty and Administrator Data Use at Achieving the Dream Colleges*

#### *A Summary of Survey Findings*

2009. Davis Jenkins and Monica Reid Kerrigan.

### *Promising Instructional Reforms in Developmental Education*

#### *A Case Study of Three Achieving the Dream Colleges*

2008. Elizabeth M. Zachry with Emily Schneider.

---

NOTE: A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site ([www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org)), from which copies of reports can also be downloaded



## About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.

