# 2021 Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Teaching and Curricular Innovation
## Clayton State University's Peer-Academic Mentor Program

Submitted by:

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To:      Members of the Regents Excellence in Momentum Year Award Committee
From:  Jill L. Lane, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Date:   October 30, 2021
Re:      Support Letter for Clayton State University's Peer Academic Mentor Program

Dear Members of the Award Committee,

On behalf of Clayton State University, I am pleased to nominate the Peer Academic Mentor (PAM) Program for the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Teaching and Curricular Innovation. Over the past five years, the PAM Program has grown as a collaboration between the Writers' Studio and the First-Year Writing Program that recruits, trains, and supports students who demonstrate superior writing abilities and strong interpersonal skills, and then matches them with faculty in the First-Year Writing Program.

Peer Academic Mentors and faculty collaborate to support first-year writing students on assignments that foster critical reading and thinking, academic writing, and metacognitive reflection. PAMs assist faculty in guiding students through the difficult process of academic writing, teaching students to use feedback to improve their writing through revision, and ultimately assembling an ePortfolio in which students articulate their writing process, what they have learned, and how they have grown as writers. This process reinforces the idea of a growth mindset and teaches students the resilience and perseverance necessary to succeed in college and beyond; it also addresses many of the goals of the Momentum Year.
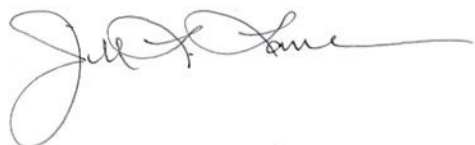
As evident in the application materials, students, PAMs, and instructors benefit from the program. One former PAM writes, "As a PAM, I really discovered that I had a passion for helping individuals who are navigating a situation and a system that they may not be completely familiar with. The joy I got from watching people succeed through the help of my input is what ultimately drove me to apply for the job with the House of Representatives where I can have an immediate effect on veterans in my district."

Perhaps the most important aspect of the PAM Program is the community of learners that it creates. The PAM program builds a community of learners among faculty, students, and PAMs. Clayton State University is fortunate to have a truly diverse student body—our students range from dual-enrollment students to senior citizens. They represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds, they come from urban and rural areas, and they come with various educational backgrounds and experiences. But the PAM program brings these individuals together to form one learning community, where students know they can ask for help, where they have access to more experienced peers who have been successful in college and have been trained to help them succeed as well. This sense of community helps students become resilient in the face of

challenges, it builds confidence, and it encourages sustained engagement in academic pursuits; in short, it helps students succeed socially and academically.

The tireless efforts of the students, PAMs, faculty, and directors of this program deserve recognition. We hope that, upon review of the application that follows, you will agree. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jill L. Lane
Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Program Overview**

The Peer-Academic Mentor Program is a collaborative effort between the First-Year Writing Program and the Writers' Studio at Clayton State University to embed Mentors in FYW courses. Mentors collaborate with faculty to foster student success and promote productive academic mindsets. Peer-Academic Mentors, or PAMs, are writing tutors specifically trained to help incoming and transfer students meet academic writing demands and promote social belonging. PAMs work closely with faculty to engage students in the writing process by individually tutoring students in class and at the Writers' Studio. PAMs ensure that first-year writing students are familiar with the curriculum, including navigating the course assignments and the cumulative e-Portfolio at the end of the semester.

The PAM Program creates a culture of learning through the support of extraordinary mentors and faculty partners. The Peer-Academic Mentor Program overlaps with the First-Year Writing Program that serves nearly 2000 students per year and the Writers' Studio that serves approximately 800 students per year with 4300 tutoring sessions. This collaboration supports both the First-Year Writing Program's mission of educating students about how humans are connected to their world through reading and writing and the Writers' Studio's mission of cultivating a community of readers and writers.



Figure 1. The team of Peer-Academic Mentors and general consultants at the Writers' Studio.

## History and Theoretical Rationale

The Peer-Academic Mentor Program began in the Fall 2017 semester with funding from the Department of Education PBI Grant. The Program began with two mentors and, in the last five years, grew to include 27 Peer-Academic Mentors that worked with over 50 sections of ENGL 1101 and ENGL 1102—the two-course series that students must pass to meet the writing requirement of the core curriculum. The program was inspired by course-embedded writing tutoring programs at other universities around the country, including the Peer Alliance Program at Valdosta State University, In-Class Tutors at California State University Channel Islands, Embedded Tutor Program at Rider University, Writing Fellows Program at University of Nevada at Reno, and others (see Carpenter, Whiddon, and Dvork's special issues of *Praxis: Writing Center Journal*).

Research related to peer writing tutors and peer mentors indicates the mutual benefits to student learning. In the article "From Peer Tutors to Writing Center Colleagues: The Potential of Writing Center Internship," the authors point the extended benefits of students who serve as peer tutors:

> The research is clear that peer tutoring in writing benefits the tutors as much as the tutees, and that those benefits extend far beyond graduation or even the first post-college job. The wonderful testimonials reproduced on the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project website attest to the powerful abilities tutors take into the workplace and their personal lives.

The Peer-Academic Mentor Program is crucial for the underserved population at Clayton State University, and all students as economic hardships make college education increasingly difficult for middle- and upper-class students and practically prohibitive for lower-income students. Based on a survey by José Luis Vargas at California State University, "the single most important factor associated with high retention and graduation rates for low-income, first-generation college students was their ability to find a mentor at CSUN. Finding a mentor not only helped students to succeed academically but also with career planning and the development of life management skills such as dealing with personal and family problems." The Peer-Academic Mentor Program applies this finding at CSU to increase retention and completion rates and promote academic mindsets that support students' growth.

The mentoring experience that Peer-Academic Mentors and their tutees share parallels the lessons and strategies attained through peer-to-peer mentorship and writing tutoring. These include "a new relationship with writing, analytical power; a listening presence; skills, values, and abilities vital in their professions; skills, values, and abilities vital in families and in relationships; earned confidence in themselves; a deeper understanding of and commitment to collaborative learning" (Hughes, Gillespe, and Kail, 2010).

# CLAYTON STATE UNIVERSITY PEER-ACADEMIC MENTOR PROGRAM FACT SHEET

The First-Year Writing program is comprised of an average of 50 sections of English 1101 and 1102 per semester. We teach approximately 24 students in each section. We average 18 full-time faculty and eight part-time faculty teaching in the program each semester. Our program does not employ teaching assistants, but we have an average of 10 Peer-Academic Mentors (PAMs) per semester embedded in sections of English 1101 and 1102. Over the past 5 years, we have had a total of 27 PAMs embedded in over 60 sections of English 1101 and 1102.

| Writers' Studios - First Year Retention Rate | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Average |
| First Year Retained | 165 | 591 | 627 | 510 | |
| Grand Total | 201 | 726 | 778 | 685 | |
| First Year Retention Rate | 82% | 81% | 81% | 74% | 80% |
| Table 1. Retention Rate of Students who Met with a PAM. | | | | | |

| Five Year Record of PAMs, FYW Sections, and Faculty Partners | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Academic Semester | PAMs | Sections | FYW Faculty Partners |
| Year 1 | Fall 2017 | 2 | Develop educational curriculum and program material with PAMs | |
| | Spring 2018 | 2 | | |
| Year 2 | Fall 2018 | 12 | 6 | 4 |
| | Spring 2019 | 8 | 11 | 9 |
| Year 3 | Fall 2019 | 8 | 15 | 10 |
| | Spring 2020 | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| Year 4 | Fall 2020 | 7 | 11 | 7 |
| | Spring 2021 | 8 | 14 | 6 |
| Year 5 | Fall 2021 | 5 | 7 | 4 |
| Table 2. The numbers of Peer-Academic Mentors, the number of FYW sections in which PAMs assisted, and the number of FYW faculty partners per semester. | | | | |

# DOCUMENTATION OF INITIATIVES AND SUCCESS IN PROMOTING STUDENT LEARNING

## A. Engaged Learning

The Peer-Academic Mentors partner with faculty and support students in the classroom by aligning with the faculty partner's teaching style. In other words, mentors and faculty determine together the roles each has during the semester. So, while mentors are available to work one-on-one with students at The Writers' Studio, they may also assist students in various ways, including:

| PAM Responsibilities | Academic Growth Mindset |
|---|---|
| Introduce PAM program to students | • Professionally represent The Writers' Studio and Clayton State University<br>• Cultivate sense of social belonging |
| Attend class and participate in discussion boards, Q&A sessions, or other in-class activities | • Integrative learning<br>• Cultivates sense of social belonging |
| Meet with instructor to discuss writing or communication assignments and how to help students | • Promote collaboration<br>• Develop professional communication<br>• Engage in critical thinking |
| Meet with individual or groups of students in D2L or Teams to discuss reading and writing assignments, brainstorm, work on specific skills or writing strategies | • Demonstrate leadership and facilitation<br>• Cultivate lifelong learners<br>• Encourage students to view intelligence as malleable |
| Reach out to students who have been absent or who have not submitted work | A small intervention that helps avoid students becoming demotivated and disengaged |
| Respond to drafts of assignments via Teams, email, or D2L | Engage in integrative learning |
| Assist students in accessing, navigating and submitting assignments in D2L | Develop adaptive perceptions of academic challenges |
| Assist students with source-based writing | Promote deep learning |
| Help students identify and access campus resources they might need | • Create a more inclusive culture and sense of belonging<br>• Build resilience |
| Serve as cultural informants to life as a university student | Cultivate a sense of belonging |

## B. PAM Program Assessment

We have collected feedback from faculty partners who have worked with the Peer-Academic Mentors, and 85% identified the mentor as either "extremely helpful" or "very helpful." Faculty have said the following in their end-of-semester reflections: "Both Peer-Academic Mentors were incredibly helpful while tutoring on workshop days when students were drafting and peer editing; however, they were also helpful during class meetings by sharing their experiences with projects and course lessons while also assisting students with in-class writing." Also telling was how faculty identified their students' interactions with the PAMs: "My PAM met individually with all of the students several times during the semester. Students were enthusiastic about meeting with her on each of their

papers. They were also very supportive of the PAM system. I am very pleased with this and would be happy to work with a PAM again in the future."

Peer-Academic Mentors reflect on their time in the program when they compose exit letters during their last semester as mentors. In these letters, they describe the PAM Program's impact on their personal and professional growth, and the deep sense of felt connection is evident throughout these letters. One mentor reflects on his experience in the following way: "Leaving this remarkable workplace with its fantastic leadership, flexibility, sense of community, and wide array of learning opportunities is heartbreaking. The Writers' Studio became a part of my identity, and, on a personal note, it is hard for me to let go of this phenomenal opportunity. Always remember that once you join the Studio family, you will, in a sense, always be a part of that family." Meanwhile, another mentor stated, "Working at The Writers' Studio affords you an opportunity to meet so many people and really build bonds and connection."

In terms of student success and based on four years of data (see Table 1), the year-to-year average first-year retention rate of students who visit the Writers' Studio to meet with a Peer-Academic Mentor is 80%--higher than any course-embedded tutoring program at Clayton State University. Also, the average retention rate is 96% for students who serve as mentors in the PAM Program. Representative of the student population of Clayton State University, most mentors are minority, female students, and some are African-American males. After serving as a Peer-Academic Mentor for two years, and a week prior to his graduation, a Black male student expressed the following sentiment when reflecting on his experience as a Peer-Academic Mentor: "As I end the semester, I am saddened that I must also leave the Writers' Studio. I cherish each moment, and every person, that I have come to encounter since joining the team. I will take away some of the best friendships, and for that I am forever grateful."

The First-Year Writing Program and the Writers' Studio have increased student success in First-Year Writing courses, which meets the Momentum Year's objective of helping students complete gateway English courses.

Peer-Academic Mentors have been instrumental in supporting remote learning in ways that exceeded the Program's original mission. While initially the PAM Program integrated online training for new PAM cohorts, with the transition to mainly online and hybrid instruction during 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Peer-Academic Mentors applied multimodal literacies to mentor their peers online. PAMs were embedded in the course-management system in courses. They also created videos for students, met individually with students in online meetings to discuss writing assignments, led small-group online workshops for first-year writing students, and continued participating in online educational workshops as part of their growth as mentors. The PAMs' capacity to support remote learning demonstrates the critical ways Peer-Academic Mentors enhance the online educational learning experience of Clayton State University's culturally diverse student population.

## C. E-portfolio Workshops
Peer-Academic Mentors work with the First-Year Writing Program Director and the Writers' Studio Director to design and facilitate in-person and virtual workshops for first-year writing students preparing to submit their cumulative e-portfolios. The e-portfolio consists of a reflection essay, a revised writing artifact, and a revised reading artifact. PAMs guide students in reflecting on how students' work relates to the course objectives, guide students through the revision process, and assist students with compiling e-portfolio material. While these workshops have traditionally been held in-person to maximize discussion and assist students with individualized technical assistance, during the Spring 2021 semester, Peer-Academic Mentors adapted to the workshop to a virtual format and offered eight workshops over four weeks.

## D. PAM and Consultant Education Program

The tutor education program at the Writers' Studio employs community of practice theory developed by Etienne Wenger and discussed at length by Geller et al.'s *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice.* The objective of an education program is to prepare both Peer-Academic Mentors and general writing consultants to model and participate in a community of learning. Mentors are expected to learn about motivational and scaffolding writing tutoring strategies, working with student writing from across the disciplines, students with learning disabilities, and multilingual students.

- Training curriculum incorporates selected readings from *The Oxford Guide to Writing Tutors: Practice and Research* and *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring,* two prominent writing tutoring education textbooks, and critical readings in the *Writing Center Journal.*
- PAMs learn about student support services, career services,
- PAMs foster reflective practices critical for understanding their growth as mentors and better insight into students' needs. After each session, PAMs reflect on the session in a digital log and, at the end of the month, they use the log to review that month's interaction with students in the classroom and at the Studio.
- PAMs partake in learning stewardship to create a writing culture and community by participating in Community Meetings, educational workshops where PAMs discuss their class and studio activities and participate in discussions on new training material for the First-Year Writing Program. Community Meetings help PAMs work as a team and foster a pedagogy of connection. They learn to view new encounters as something to learn from, develop a stronger sense of agency by asking how much they can determine what will happen in a mentoring interaction, and enhance their commitment by promoting an ongoing effort to explore.
- PAMs also foster a community of learners by working in small-group learning communities each semester to address first-year writing students' writing and learning needs creatively. For example, PAMs develop handouts on critical skills, such as developing topic sentences and organizing academic essays. Some groups dedicate their time researching writing tutoring approaches to supporting students with learning disabilities and multilingual students. These group interactions allow mentors to share readings that interest them and will be helpful for current and future PAM cohorts. Learning communities promote active learning and connect mentors' existing knowledge with what they do not yet know. A community of practice also means sustaining mutual learning, which is why PAMs share what they create and learn in Community Meetings and discuss new ideas and possibilities explored in the learning communities.

## E. PAM and Multimodal Engagement

### 1. PAMs and Dedicated Discussion Board Topic

Students commonly access course information from the course's Desire2Learn learning space, which is why Peer-Academic Mentors can also access their assigned course's D2L space. In these courses, PAMs can respond to discussion board activities and provide motivational and scaffolding strategies to give feedback to students from a peer's perspective. These asynchronous interventions develop connections and lay the groundwork for a community of learners.

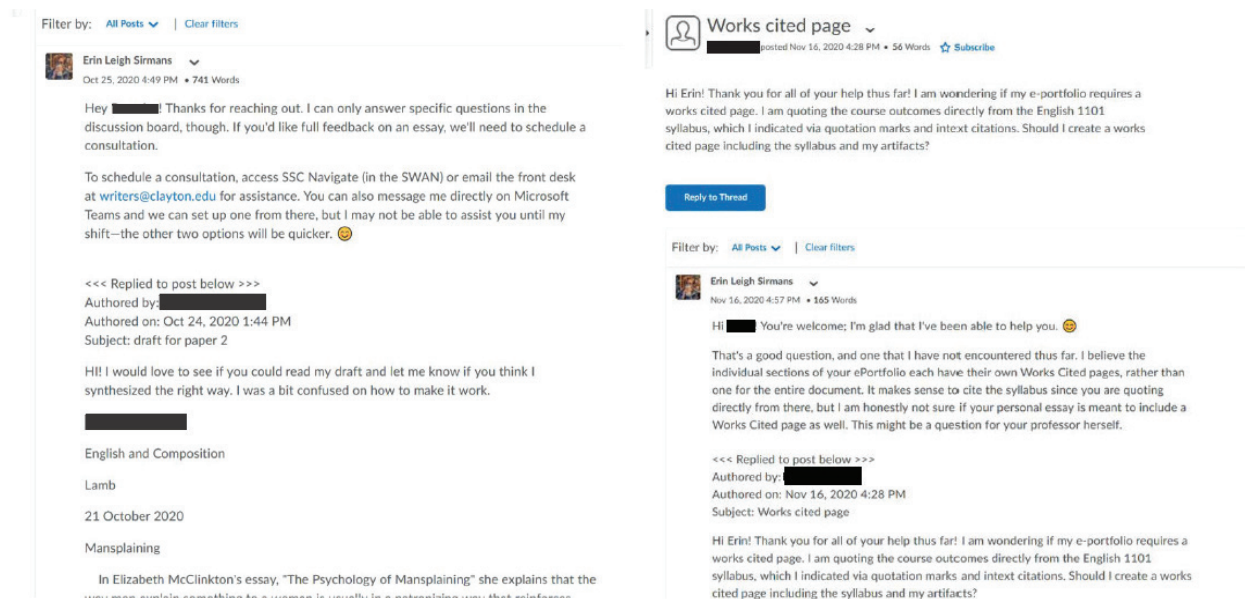| Topic | Threads | Posts | Last Post |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Your Peer Academic Mentor** ⌄<br><br>Hi class, We have a Peer Academic Mentor (PAM), Erin Leigh Sirmans, in the class. This student is here to work with you on your writing and help you succeed. Post questions here for your PAM. NOTE: The discussion board is for specific questions and cannot replace an appointment. | 7 | 16 | Mary Lamb<br>Nov 17, 2020 11:06 AM |

Figure 2. Examples of PAM intervention on the discussion board. An example of a discussion board thread with two examples of students reaching out to their Peer-Academic Mentor with questions about their first-year writing class.

## 2. PAMs and Digital Contact Card

Students entering first-year writing courses have grown accustomed to visual texts to focus their attention, which is why Peer-Academic Mentors create digital business cards with their names, office hours, and contact information for their students. Faculty share the PAMs' digital contact cards on the announcement section of D2L or by email.
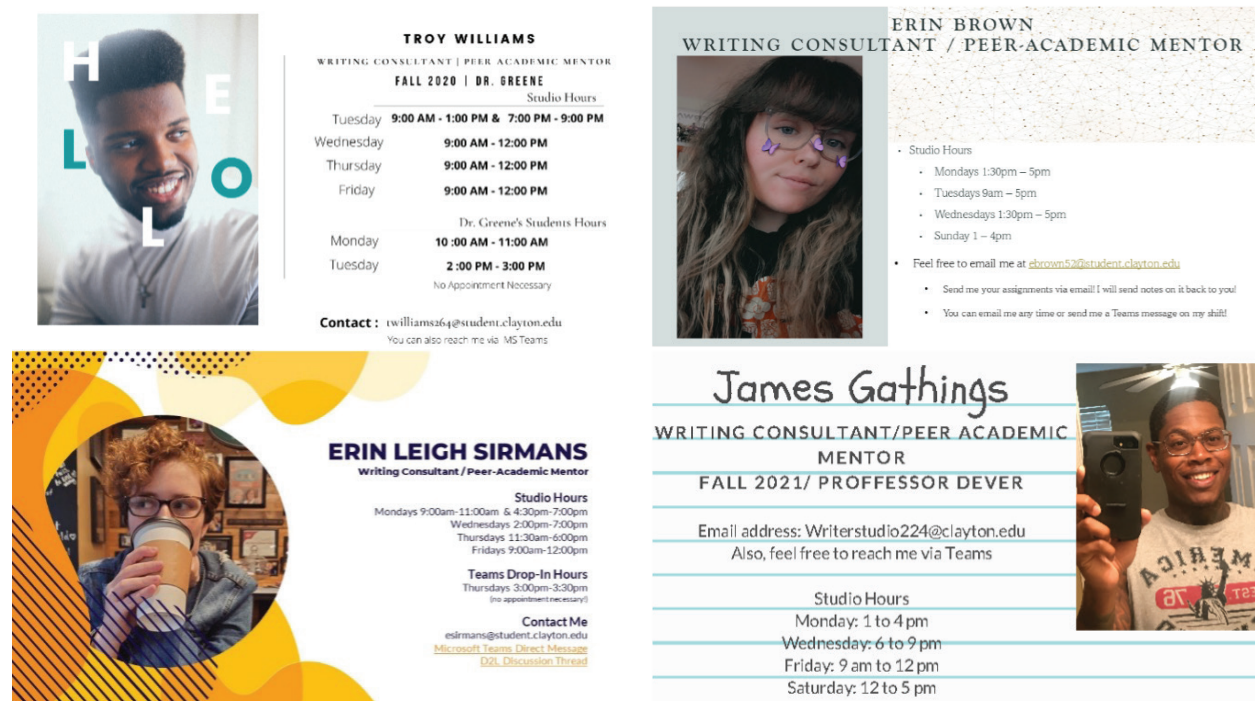


Figure 3. Examples of digital business cards for Peer-Academic Mentors.

## 3. PAM and Blogs

PAMs look for ways to make themselves accessible to first-year students in-person and online, and blogs are a way to support students who may pursue asynchronous interactions. The blog provides information about the PAMs and serves as a launching point for directing students to additional online writing resources to help students stay on the path to success.



# Thi's and Jamie's Writing Desk

If you wish to be a better writer, write. - Epictetus

**Assignment Calendar** 📅 Calendar view ⌄

October 2021                                                    < Today >

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 26  | 27  | 28  | 29  | 30  | Oct 1 | 2 |

**Hours**

OFFICE HOURS
Friday (12:00 PM-2:00 PM) Online

THI'S STUDIO HOURS
Thursday (1:00 PM- 5:00 PM) In-Person
Friday (10:00 AM-12:00 PM) In-Person

## What is a Peer-Academic Mentor?

- A Peer-Academic Mentor (PAM) is a personal writing tutor for your first year of university writing. We work one-on-one with you to develop your writing assignments at all stages of writing. Our ultimate goal is to help you succeed at your end-of-the-semester E-portfolio.

## What is the difference between Office Hours and Studio Hours?

- Office hours are specifically designated hours for our students to come and see us. Appointments are not needed. However, assistance will be available on a first-come-first-serve basis.
- Studio Hours are hours that Jamie and I work at the Writers' Studio. Appointments are needed. Click the link at the bottom of the page to make an appointment with us. If we are not available, we encourage you to book with another consultant. Everyone is wonderful and is willing to help.

## About The Writers' Studio

Services: Interdisciplinary writing consultations. Assignments and scholarships.

Website: https://www.clayton.edu/arts-sciences/departments/english/writers-studio/

Physical Location:
- Arts and Sciences Building, Room 224

Hours:
- Monday - Thursday (9 AM -5 PM)
- Friday (9 AM-12 PM)

Figure 4. Example of a Peer Academic blog dedicated to first-year writing students.

## 4. PAM and Videos

The Peer-Academic Mentors at the Writers' Studio aim to help First-Year Writing students stay on the path of completing English 1101 and English 1102. As part of that objective, PAMs include multiliteracy practices to support diverse learners through videos in three ways:

> 1. PAMs incorporate videos into email-based tutoring sessions by providing summative feedback through video. These videos apply the strengths, weaknesses, and next steps heuristic to increase students' motivation and pinpoint immediate actionable items that students can take to improve their writing.

2. PAMs also record virtual writing consultations and share these recordings with students at the end of the session. Recordings include autogenerated captions to better support students with learning differences.

3. PAMs also created instructional videos for First-Year Writing students on core writing skills, grammar, and mechanics. These videos include examples and practice exercises. Recordings also allow students to reference the session at a later time.
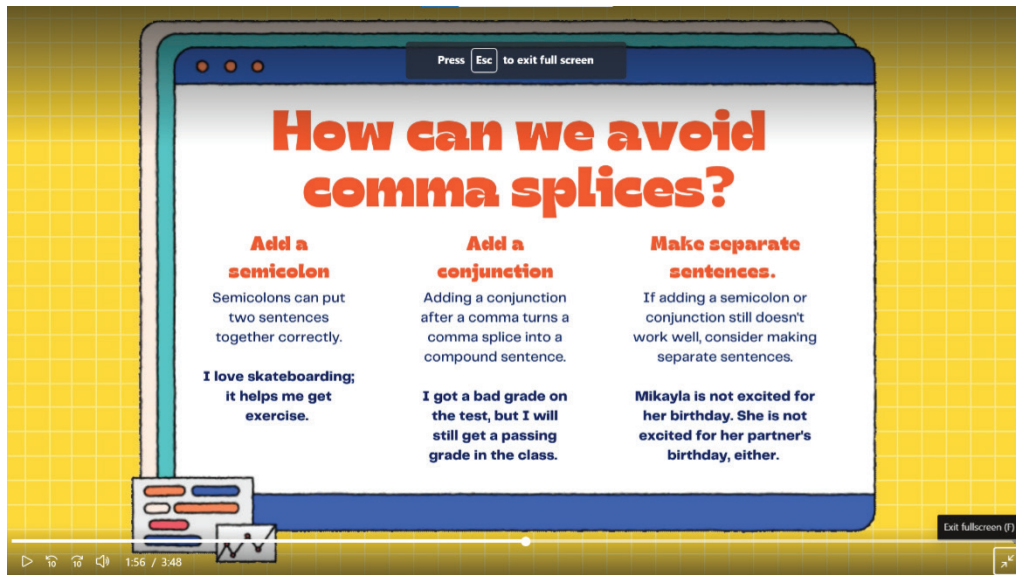


Figure 5. An example from an instructional video created by Peer-Academic Mentors.

## F. Technological Innovation in Curriculum

### 1. Digital Textbook

The program's custom text, *Connections*, was created ten years ago to meet the needs of our students and provide a common text for all sections of English 1101 and 1102. As the title suggests, the text focuses on various connections that students will make in their time at Clayton State University; the text invites students to "Connect [their] writing to [their] own experiences, to Clayton State University, to other students to [their] communities, and to [their] future profession[s]." But equally important are the many connections that the book establishes among the members of our program and university community, as the book connects students to other resources on campus, with information about the Writers' Studio, academic honesty, technical support, programmatic and university policies, and career preparation. Finally, the text connects current students with faculty and former students through the inclusion of content written by faculty members and former first-year writing students. Current students are offered the opportunity to submit their best work from English 1101 and English 1102 in the spring semester for inclusion in the textbook, and



Figure 6. Front cover of the digital textbook *Connections: Guide to First-Year Writing at Clayton State University*, which is part of the curriculum for both English 1101 and English 1102.

faculty are invited to contribute chapters annually. Students, then, are presented with a text produced in collaboration with faculty and their peers. They read chapters written by the faculty who teach them, published authors, and current Clayton State University students, and they understand that their work could be included in the next edition.

In addition to serving as a source of information and vehicle for connecting faculty and students, *Connections* was also created with the intent to reduce financial barriers for first-year students. Since it is used in all sections of English 1101 or 1102, students do not have to worry about purchasing new books if they switch sections, and they can use the same textbook for both 1101 and 1102, reducing their costs to take these required courses. In 2020, we were awarded an Affordable Learning Georgia grant to digitize the text and provide it for free to all first-year writing students at Clayton State, further eliminating financial barriers and ensuring that all students have access to the materials necessary to succeed in these foundational courses.

## 2. First-Year Writing D2L Module

Peer- Academic Mentors develop and maintain a content module on Desire2Learn with resources commonly shared with first-year writing students. First-Year Writing faculty incorporate the content module in their course. The resources address writing skills critical for students, including thesis development, rhetorical analysis, plagiarism, and common grammar and mechanics errors. The module also includes custom handouts created by PAMs and writing consultants at the Writers' Studio.



Figure 7. Examples of content in the First-Year Writing PAM module.

## 3. Lochbot, the Writers' Studio Chatbot

In the spring of 2019, in collaboration with the university's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Peer-Academic Mentors participated in developing Lochbot, the Writers' Studio's chatbot for first-year writing courses. During the alpha development phase of the bot, Peer-Academic Mentors participated in a usability test and focus group interview to provide feedback on how the bot would serve students. This feedback helped the Studio determine the bot's main features and establish the need to integrate the chatbot into the homepage of FYW D2L courses, allowing students to seek information about the Studio's operations and services from the learning environment with which they are most familiar.

The benefit of Lochbot is that it is available to students around the clock and responds to frequently asked questions about the Writers' Studio's services, including scheduling or canceling an appointment, hours, location, contact information, and how to prepare for a consultation. For example, students can receive answers to questions such as "how do I schedule an appointment at the Studio?" or "how can I get help with my writing?" This resource is valuable to students because it connects students with support and resources at any hour of the day, which is crucial for a student population that often works full time or has other responsibilities in addition to their education.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, while campus services were online, the Writers' Studio partnered with the university's library to adopt a live agent widget. The widget allows for real-time interaction between the Studio's team members and students asking questions on the widget. Furthermore, the widget can be embedded on a public-facing website, such as the Studio's website, and function as a widget in a Desire2Learn class. The widget is now embedded on the Studio's website and is also embedded in D2L courses. The Studio handles the conversations on the widget using the language designed for Lochbot, the Writers' Studio chatbot. Since the widget allows for real-time interaction, conversations can extend beyond scripted dialogue; however, the dialogue created for Lochbot serves as a template for frequently asked questions. Thanks to the language crafted by the Peer-Academic Mentors for the chatbot, the Studio was able to adopt that dialogue to anticipate students' needs in the live agent widget.

Figure 8. The interface for the live agent widget embedded on the Studio's homepage and within Desire2Learn courses.

## REFERENCES

Gillespie, Paula, and Neal Learner. *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson, 2007.

Hall, Mark R. *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work: An Inquiry-Based Approach to Tutor Education*. Utah State University Press, 2017.

Ianetta, Melissa, and Lauren Fitzgerald. *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research*. New York: Oxford University. 2016.

Wenger, Etienne, McDermott, Richard, and William M. Snyder. *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. Boston: Harvard University, 2002.

To Whom It May Concern,

For myself, the PAM program was instrumental in my own development as a student throughout my coursework. Due to the nature of my degree program, there was a heavy focus on writing and my work in assisting first year students with their own assignments allowed me to hone my technical and editing skills. While the PAM program can be challenging at times, I appreciated the opportunity to influence and assist the students who came to us for help. Every situation was different and flexibility was instrumental in motivating and ultimately assisting the students in their academic endeavors.

The students who utilize the PAM program all experienced different difficulties and expectations from the program. Whether students came to us willingly or as remedial assistance required by their coursework, I feel that they generally left our sessions feeling more confident in the work we'd done. It's instrumental to understand the students and their motivations, the one-on-one instruction and guidance provided by the PAMs allowed for tailored sessions and individualized experiences which I believe offered a safe and productive environment to address their issues. By introducing PAMs in the first year of higher education, Clayton State University was able to not only identify students who had problem areas but introduce them to a setting that was far more focused on their needs as individuals rather than let them fall between the cracks. Ensuring success in foundational courses during the first year is an important factor in building a student's confidence and promoting forward momentum as they move into course areas more focused on their personal interests. By instilling the sense of pride and accomplishment in core coursework, it appeared at least in my personal experience, that students were more secure in their own abilities to move forward into their more advanced courses.

It is key for students to develop writing skills early in their higher education journey as it will be utilized in all aspects of their lives moving forward. Whether their programs be a liberal arts focus or something in STEM, everyone needs to develop appropriate writing skills in order to communicate professionally in inter office communications or for more in-depth requirements such as technical writing and documentation. Reframing the importance of composition into real world applications beyond the scope of creative writing and literary criticism is key, as most students have only been exposed to writing in this capacity.

Working as a PAM exposed me to several different style guides and requirements that were not utilized in my own coursework. However, this exposure allowed me to quickly pick up the skills and repurpose them to excel in my own writing endeavors. This benefit also extended into my professional life following graduation as a Congressional Staffer. The scope of my responsibilities now spans from informal communication and writing such as Letters of Appreciation or Letters of Recommendation to more technical writing in the realm of legislation and policy. Having a broad pool of style experience is instrumental to my current work due to the wide variety of individuals I correspond with whether they be individual constituents, Federal Agency liaisons, Congressional Committee members or other Member offices. I credit the PAM program with introducing and educating me on a variety of skills that I otherwise would not have been exposed to.

Respectfully,

Joshua B. Dailey

Joshua.dailey@me.com

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To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Thi Mai. In 2020, I entered the Writers' Studio at Clayton State University as a Peer-Academic Mentor (PAM). From my one-year experience, I have had wonderful opportunities. I will be speaking of these opportunities with nothing but genuine honesty.

The first of many things is the chance to work with students in a continuous and close setting. Being a PAM, I am assigned to one faculty member or class for a semester. Throughout the semester, the students and I work hands-on with each assignment's writing process. We brainstorm, draft, and revise together through each assignment to assure that all criteria are successfully met. This contributes to the goal of passing their English cores.

Besides the mechanics of writing, the students develop transferable skills to all areas of their education. Some skills to name in short are organizing, planning, and analyzing. We have sessions dedicated to idea slamming and later making those ideas more concrete through organizing. A plan is put into action to make the goal more attainable. Then, we use critical thinking to make purposeful revisions. This writing process is applicable to other cores' assignments, but it also builds a growth mindset for other endeavors. I wholeheartedly enjoy seeing them grow as not just students but overall professionals.

Beyond the students' growth, I also have had takeaways. The biggest lesson for me is that everyone is different. People process and express ideas differently, and so my mentoring must be person oriented. This is an immeasurable takeaway for me as an aspiring nurse. Many people may not know this, but one of the roles of a nurse is being an educator. We provide and explain information to patients to promote health and wellness. Being a PAM has definitely made me more confident in taking on this role.

Overall, the PAMs program gave my students and myself the opportunity to learn skills that we will use throughout our professional lives.


Sincerely,

Thi Mai

Peer-Academic Mentor

Tmai10@student.clayton.edu

21 October 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

The PAM program managed by Dr. Sipai Klein and Dr. Jennifer Parrott has benefited my students and my teaching approaches in meaningful ways. The program works in tandem with our co-requisite learning support model to guide students strategically in their First Year English required courses.
Having peer academic mentors assigned to my classes has helped me improved my teaching material. When a PAM is assigned to my class, I meet with the mentor periodically to discuss assignments and student feedback of the course material. PAMs have served me well by alerting me to assignment instructions that may confuse students and by explaining where students need more clarification.

For students, PAMs are a consistent and familiar method of support. Having a mentor embedded in our course prevents students from having to relay to them all of the basic assignments and themes in the course when they go to them for help. Since I teach English 0999 and 1101, students have continuity from one class to the next, and having a PAM in each of those courses offers students even more continuity of support. Students become familiar with the mentor assigned to our class, and they often continue to ask for help from that same mentor in the Writers' Studio in subsequent semesters.

Over the years of the PAM program, I have had several different mentors serve the class in distinctive ways. One of the first PAMs, Kiara Shoulders, faithfully attended my class. She silently listened during class to understand my lessons so that she could explain assignments to students and answer their questions. Another PAM, Hannah Carr, met with me weekly to report which students were accessing her as a writing resource and taking advantage of the hours of consultation she set aside specifically for my students. Preparing to discuss my assignments and lessons with her heightened my awareness of my approaches to teaching and my transparency in crafting assignment descriptions. Troy Williams worked with me for about three years. He specifically served my students who were in learning support. My students felt very comfortable approaching Troy for help. His familiarity with campus supports and the assignments in First Year Writing made him a great resource for students. Finally, Erin Brown, my current PAM, has reached out to students I've identified as needing assistance. Like PAMs before her, she has set aside hours specifically for supporting my students' questions and writing concerns.

The program is equally valuable for the students who serve as PAMs because they interact with faculty in professional ways. By keeping consistent in-person or virtual meetings, creating infographics to highlight their hours of availability and by working with students who have different learning styles and educational strengths and weaknesses, they make meaningful connections with professors that further facilitates their membership in an academic community. Their role as PAMs impacts their soft skills and their executive functioning, and both skills will serve them in their roles after graduation.

I believe the PAM program is exactly the type of people-driven educational support that impacts a student far beyond the semester of contact. Having a peer-mentor guide students as they navigate a course is critically important to student success. The one-on-one mentorship of PAMs reinforces the idea that each of us needs support to grow academically and otherwise.

Sincerely,

Cantice Greene, PhD
Professor of English, Clayton State University

October 24, 2021

Awards Committee
Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Teaching and Curriculum Innovation
University System of Georgia
270 Washington St. SW
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Committee Members:

I would like to offer my enthusiastic recommendation of Clayton State University's Peer Academic Mentor (PAM) program for the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Teaching and Curriculum Innovation.

I have been fortunate to collaborate with PAMs, Jamie Gray and Thi Mai since I began partnering with the program for my first-year writing courses. During our weekly meetings, we discuss upcoming assignments, address questions about the student writing they review, and of course, brainstorm ways to further help students. These meetings have helped us collectively reinforce course concepts in our engagements with students for easier retention and application. Thi and Jamie have also worked tirelessly to be as accessible to students as possible by providing PAM and Clayton State Writers' Studio orientations for my students in person and virtually, setting up a discussion forum on our D2L course website, offering Teams office hours, and even designing a website outside of D2L where students can find out more about receiving assistance from them and other Writers' Studio consultants – all in one place.

These efforts have been effective, as students have expressed excitement about working with them and have consistently found their assistance "very" or "extremely" helpful – with one student stating that they were grateful to receive "useful feedback from a trusted source." Jamie and Thi have been especially instrumental in strengthening content-area and emotional support for students who were struggling in the course, and subsequently contributed to them completing the course successfully.

Ultimately, the fruitful endeavors put forward by Jamie, Thi, and the PAM program in its entirety provide immense value to first-year writing students at Clayton State by offering necessary support to cultivate more profound learning experiences, and as I've indicated, even in the midst of setbacks. The program's emphasis on such support embodies the Momentum Year program's goals in fostering the necessary growth mindset for students in their first years of college to continue and complete their degree programs. Therefore, it is my absolute pleasure to recommend the PAM program for the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Teaching and Curriculum Innovation.

Best Regards,

*Kavita Surya*

Kavita Surya, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of English
Clayton State University

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