A Terminological Study
of Peer Education in Higher Education

A White Paper prepared for the
College Reading and Learning Association

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CRLA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This white paper, commissioned by the College Reading and Learning Association, examines the increasing prevalence and influence of peer education on college campuses through a terminological study of the peer educator role. In doing so, we offer a comprehensive and unifying understanding of the scope of service and leadership of peer educators, discuss best practices for developing peer education programs, and explore the future of the field of peer education. This paper attempts to answer several key questions:

- How do scholars and practitioners define and use the terms *peer education* and *peer educator*?

- What does this suggest about the nature of peer education and the role of peer educators in college students' success?

- What is the future of peer education in higher education?

A Terminological Study of Peer Education in Higher Education

Astin (1993) argued in his foundational book *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited* that peers are "the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398). Given that powerful statement, it is easy to understand why hundreds upon thousands of peer programs have been developed at institutions of higher learning worldwide. Though peer education dates back to the days of Aristotle's archons (Sturdivant & Souhan, 2011), there has been a more recent proliferation of new and innovative peer education programs throughout operational divisions within institutions of higher education over the past two decades. The peer program titles used at these schools, though, are often misunderstood because comprehensive and specific titles are often used differently from one institution to the next.

The existing nomenclature referencing peer educators is vast and reflects the diversity of positions found within any institution of higher education. Although the prevalence of peer educators across campus entities is a strength, the variety of terms used in reference to such roles can result in conceptual ambiguity about peer education in general. In a review of research on peer tutoring, Falchikov (2001) concluded that peer tutors do not constitute "a unitary concept" (p. 4) and further remarked, "a [university] teacher interested in the idea of peer tutoring is faced with what, at first sight, seem to be many pieces of a puzzle with no guiding picture to aid understanding of the whole" (p. 7). While some scholars have attributed this multiplicitous nature to the complexity and variety of responsibilities peer educators hold across and within college living and learning domains (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Goldschmid & Goldschmid, 1976; Haber, 2011), others suggest the need for more unilateral understanding about the relationship between the terms used in referencing peer

educator roles and the broader conceptual framework guiding their construction (Breslin et al., 2018; Bruffee, 1993; Haber, 2011). As Breslin et al. (2018) assert, "What we call our peer educators is one of many facets of how their positions are conceptualized and designed, and how this is communicated to campus stakeholders and the peer educators themselves" (p. 53). It is in this spirit that we approach our work in undertaking a terminological study of peer educators in higher education.

Terminological studies represent a methodological approach to understanding how language is used in everyday life to represent concepts in a given subject field (Cole, 1987). Accordingly, terms are commonly referenced words or phrases in professional or scholarly discourses that signify and ground mutual understanding of a conceptual idea, and often represent field-specific connotations of meaning (Cole, 1987). One goal of terminological studies is to examine the relationship between a concept and its representative terms to uncover how such terms converge to construct and communicate knowledge about a particular domain (Rey, 1995). In this regard, the study of terminology is both a theoretical and pragmatic undertaking as scholars seek to map out the set of naming conventions used in the application of a concept to everyday practices in order to generate a common conceptual understanding (Cabre, 1992/1999; Cole, 1987). Cabre (1992/1999) argued that the significance for such work is the affordance of communicative meaning and the advancement of a recognized identity. These aims are particularly salient for peer education as it has gained much prominence in professional and scholarly fields, and yet remains loosely defined by the divergent terms invoked throughout its history.

Thus, our purpose in undertaking this terminological study is to explore the various descriptive terms used in reference to peer educator roles in an effort to identify the differences, similarities, and points of conceptual

convergence across terms. We draw upon both historical and contemporary scholarship to frame our discussion and take a comprehensive and pragmatic approach to our analysis, using literature spanning a breadth of applications and perspectives in order to consider the various possibilities of interaction between peer education and the programmatic contexts in which it is implemented. In doing so, we aim to offer a unifying definition of the purpose and nature of the peer educator role, identify best practices for developing peer education programs, and further establish peer education as a prominent field of practice within higher education.

Brief History of Peer Education in Higher Education

Undergraduate students have worked in positions of service to their peers for hundreds of years. For example, one of the earliest conceptions of peer tutoring dates back to the eighteenth century in Madras, Italy, where Andrew Bell observed his older students instructing their younger classmates to write. Realizing the benefits, Bell employed this Madras system of education, which garnered widespread recognition and use across Europe (Pariser, 2012). In the late 1800s, Harvard administrators identified upper-division students to serve as role models to the more impressionable first-year peers as they transitioned into college (Strumpf et al., 2003). Beginning in the 1900s, college students worked in residence life and housing departments in various capacities, like resident assistants and counselors (Newton & Ender, 2010).

As the numbers of colleges and universities began to grow in the twentieth century and then into the twenty-first and as the populations of campuses continued to increase, so, too, did the numbers of peer education programs. The increasing trend of instituting peer-to-peer support was observed as early as the 1960s (Ender & Kay, 2001), while some scholars noted a surge in expansion beginning in the 1990s (Bernet & Mouzon, 2001; Budge, 2006). A more recent increase of peer educators in curricular-affiliated programs suggests a more widespread prominence across academic and student affairs divisions today (Keup, 2016). Between the years 2000 and 2018, the population of undergraduates at degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States increased from 13.2 million to 16.6 million (NCES, n.d.). With increased enrollment and sluggish or decreased budgets, colleges and universities are continuing to search for inventive and economical approaches to serving students (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Hiring peer educators to serve in paraprofessional roles helps to meet the rising demand for student assistance, decreases campus costs by hiring part-time students in place of full-time employees, and provides peer educators

with experiences to expand their personal skill sets and improve their employability (Bernert & Mouzon, 2001; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Keup, 2012; Latino, 2017).

As the surge of peer education programs took place in the late twentieth century, professional organizations in the field of higher education began to recognize the need for standards, outcomes, and best practices for peer education programs. The College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), following a national conference in 1986, formed a team of professionals to develop a formal tutor training program standard for higher education tutoring programs in the United States and Canada. In 1989, the International Tutor Program Certification (ITPC), now known as the International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC), was developed and now certifies more than 1,200 programs worldwide, approximately 95% of which are peer-to-peer tutoring programs (CRLA, 2018). In 1994, the BACCHUS (Boost Alcohol Consciousness Concerning the Health of University Students) Network launched the Certified Peer Educator program, now under the umbrella of NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, to certify students serving in positions of health and wellness peer education (Arnold, 2015). Over its 26-year history, BACCHUS has certified over 350,000 peer educators (NASPA, n.d.-a). Seeing continued growth in many peer mentoring programs, CRLA developed a sibling certification to ITPC in 1998, the International Mentor Program Certification (IMPC), later named the International Mentor Training Program Certification (IMTPC), and now known as the International Peer Educator Training Program (IPTPC). From its inception, IPTPC has certified a variety of qualified peer-helping-peer training programs on higher education campuses: peer mentors, peer academic leaders (e.g., Supplemental Instruction, Peer Assisted Study Sessions), peer facilitators, peer coaches, peer advisors, etc. These three trailblazing certifications helped to set standards for training, supervision, and assessment in peer education programs across operational divisions in colleges and universities, and further paved the way for a professionalization of institutional practices.

FROM PARAPROFESSIONAL TO PEER EDUCATOR

In 1974, a team of college faculty and administrators penned a monograph for the American College Personnel Association (at the time a division of the American Personnel and Guidance Association) outlining the processes by which higher education staff should select, train, supervise, and assess their paraprofessional student employees (Delworth et al., 1974). Delworth et al.'s handbook served as one of the earliest peer-helping-peer training guides for college and university administrators in divisions of both

academic and student affairs. These pioneers defined a paraprofessional as:

> a person without extended professional training who is specifically selected, trained, and given ongoing supervision to perform some designated portion of the tasks usually performed by the professional. This does not include offering of support services, e.g. clerical, as the major function. … He is generally a member of the indigenous population, or the population being served. (p. 12)

In using the term *student paraprofessionals*, the authors delineated among the various student worker positions on college campuses that exist to support administrative unit functions. Their use of the term was also evident in their dedication of the handbook to administrators and staff supervising the students serving in the sundry student-helping-student roles on college campuses, described as academic, social, and personal helping roles. Through the publication of the monograph, the American Personnel and Guidance Association officially sanctioned the use of student paraprofessionals within academic and non-academic college settings (Delworth et al., 1974).

Although neither the terms *peer education* nor *peer educator* were used in the 1974 American College Personnel Association monograph, the writing is significant as it helped to lay an early foundation for this critical niche within higher education. One of the primary reasons the authors provided for writing issue 17 in the American College Personnel Association Series was to demonstrate the compelling need for increased student services while college and university budgets were being drastically cut in the 1970s. Delworth et al. (1974) saw these well-trained undergraduate paraprofessionals as both helpful and necessary to the provision of the college experience and advocated for the sustainment and evolution of peer-helping-peer programs.

EARLY AND SHIFTING USE OF THE TERMS PEER EDUCATION AND PEER EDUCATOR

One of the earliest references to the term *peer education*, used as an umbrella reference to a paraprofessional helping program, was during the 1972 Annual Conference of the Western College Reading Association, now known as CRLA. Deborah K. Osen called for educators to consider the use of peer education programs for college reading if, after performing a needs assessment, college students could benefit from paraprofessional reading assistance. While Osen (1972) provides no further explanation in the paper about the peer education program, her acknowledgment of the term within the field of college reading suggests the

prevalence of peer support roles in academic units at that time.

In a 1973 report by James L. Bess and colleagues about the state of student life at State University of New York (SUNY) at Stony Brook, a full section is dedicated to "The Services and Peer Helping." In this report, Bess et al. call for the recognition that peers are important resources for one another and can fill roles to assist in both academic and non-academic facets of student life. In tandem, the authors offer an account of SUNY Stony Brook's administrative support for a peer advising program and the development of a course to train these paraprofessional students. Although inconsistent in their use throughout the report, Bess et al. reference the term *peer education*, making the report one of the earliest uses as an overarching term for peer-helping-peer positions in the field of higher education.

In addition to these known works within the academic and student life domains, the terms *peer education* and *peer educator* have a long history of consistent use within student health and wellness fields. References to the terms in scholarly journals in the early 1970s most frequently cited peer education programs designed to educate adolescents about topics related to health education (Davis, 1970; Starsiak & Under, 1974). The establishment of the BACCHUS initiative further instantiated peer education as a key practice within student health services. Yet, despite its prominence within this particular subfield, it is important to recognize the rich longevity through which peer education has persisted and permeated across university learning and living contexts. Through efforts at both the institutional and professional organization levels, peer education gained momentum for an unprecedented expansion since these early inceptions, setting the foundation for the recognition it would later receive.

THE ADVENT OF A CONVENTIONAL DISCOURSE

Ender and Newton's (2000) *Students Helping Students* is highly regarded as the most comprehensive account of peer education within the field of higher education and is widely referenced by scholars and practitioners interested in the influence of peers on undergraduate student learning, development, and persistence. In the foreword of their 2010 edition, John N. Gardner heralded it as "important work" (p. xi) and suggested the "use of this book by our students could truly be individually and institutionally life transformative" (p. xvii). Although Ender and Newton might be recognized for pioneering the term peer educator in 2000, their contemporary definition emerges from a broader historical connotation of the concept as we described earlier. As early as 1983, Ender began applying a central notion of peer leaders to capture

the breadth of roles represented in college programs, as he defined them as:

> paraprofessional [students] who have been selected and trained to offer educational services to their peers. These services are intentionally designed to assist in the adjustment, satisfaction, and persistence of students toward attainment of their educational goals. (p. 324, as cited in Ender & Newton, 2000, p. 2)

Later, Gould and Lomax (1993) defined *peer education* as "instruction or guidance from equals" in which the nature of the instructional relationship and influence would differ by context, process, and content (p. 235). In 2000, Ender and Newton drew attention to the rising prevalence of student assistance roles and the need for conceptual grounding as they called for a "comprehensive descriptor… [that] encompasses many campus roles and provides a starting point for the development of training skills and competencies" (p. 2). In an effort to start a contemporary discourse on peer education, they leveraged Ender's (1983) original peer leader designation, shifting the term *leader* to *educator*, and further emphasized that students serving in these roles are *educators* who "assist others in the learning process," are *helpers* "that assist others in an array of activities," and are *paraprofessionals* "with specialized but limited training that enables them to perform specific tasks typically performed by professionals" (p. 3, emphasis in original). Across the two editions of *Students Helping Students*, Newton and Ender (2010) retained the essence of their original definition while continually acknowledging the breadth of scope in which the peer-to-peer practice is carried out across campus entities, as they defined *peer educators* as "students who have been selected, trained, and designated by a campus authority to offer educational services to their peers…designed to assist peers towards attainment of educational goals" (p. 6).

Since their initial publication in 2000, Newton and Ender's collective work has been cited over 300 times across national and international interdisciplinary journals. This body of scholarship is as diverse as the field itself, chronicling curricular and co-curricular positions, contexts and experiences, speaking to issues of program training and coordination, and describing effects and outcomes for participants and institutions. Interestingly, the extent to which their work has influenced an ongoing dialogue on peer education has not mirrored the use of their coined term *peer educator*. In fact, a general search of the literature referencing their work reveals that less than half (42%) of the citing literature carry over the terms *peer educator* and *peer education* into the content of the manuscript. This observed contrast between referencing a common work

and employing a common terminology warrants further consideration into what varied connotations are currently being casted under the guise of Newton and Ender's conceptualization of the peer educator role and how the varied terminologies advance a mutual understanding of peer education today.

Contemporary Applications of Peer Education as a Conceptual Entity

Trends in referencing the terms *peer educator* and *peer education* in scholarship published after Ender and Newton's (2001) influential work suggest unresolved tensions between the acknowledgment of peer education as a programmatic practice unique to specific domains and the recognition of an established professional field. The ways in which these terms are used varies quite extensively throughout current literature. For instance, in the literature on higher education health and wellness initiatives, the terms are consistently employed to reference the field's common programmatic approach to utilizing peers in educational outreach. Brack et al. (2010) defined *peer educators* as having responsibilities to "counsel, provide information, and conduct outreach programs" (p. 566) while Erhardt et al. (2006) suggested "peer health education is the teaching or sharing of health information, values, and behaviors" (p. 40, citing Sciacca, 1987, p. 4). As the BACCHUS Network has historically leveraged the term *peer educator* to classify the use of peers across health and wellness programs, the literature reflects this standardization. However, just as Ender and Newton (2000) acknowledged the synonymy across terms like *peer counselor, mentor, tutor, resident assistant* and *orientation leader*, we see this continue in the ways in which scholars across other subfields of scholarship, such as academic support and first-year experience programs, make both explicit and implicit links between specific programmatic titles (e.g., *peer coaches, peer facilitators, peer leaders*) and the broader conventional term of *peer educator*.

Across existent literature, we notice a tendency to leverage the terms *peer educator* and *peer education* in an effort to situate localized roles within larger frames of reference to conventionalize the practice. For instance, in reporting the results from a national survey on peer leadership, Keup (2016) asserted "peer leadership is used interchangeably with other descriptors of students helping students on college campuses…terms [including] peer educator, peer helper, student paraprofessional, student assistant, student aid, and student helper" (p. 1). Catanzarite and Robinson's (2013) essay on peer education in campus suicide prevention programs cited Newton and Ender's (2010) work in their call for recognizing the paraprofessional nature of the position while noting the expanding contextual

roles: "peer educators are specialized leaders and can assume such roles as resident assistant, peer counselor, ambassador, orientation leader, peer health educator, peer tutor, and student conduct advisor" (p. 44). In Dennett and Azar's (2011) theoretical analysis of the developmental capacity of peer educators, the term is operationalized in relation to the positional responsibilities: "peer educators play a variety of roles that include teaching, mentoring, and creating and presenting workshops and programs" (p. 10). As demonstrated by these examples, the term *peer educator* is employed as an umbrella category to offer conceptual grounding to the growing corpus of student helping positions offered across college campus entities in order to define the contexts and functions to which the roles relate.

Another way in which scholars use the terms is to establish clarity and credibility of localized roles. Given the influx of terms and the varying connotations of roles, some scholars draw upon the notion of peer education to contextualize the relationship of the peer-to-peer role (D'Abate, 2009; Dadonna, 2011; Gafney & Varma-Nelson, 2007; Haras & McEvoy, 2005). For example, Haras and McEvoy (2005) referenced *peer educators* as they differentiate the positions of study group leaders and tutors from formal instructors, stating that "peer educators do not replace teachers. Instead, they act as guides to other students' learning, students whose background and experience somehow mirror their own" (p. 259). In D'Abate's (2009) research on peer mentoring for first-year student transitions, the author cited Ender and Newton (2000) to support their claim about the limitations of peer-to-peer influence:, "peer mentors are models who promote the first-year student's responsibility for him or herself [or theirself] and a self-discovery process, but are not sources of protection or shelter that may create dependency" (p. 84). Additionally, authors consistently cited the rise of peer-to-peer programs and the increasing volume of evidence speaking to their efficacy for both student and institutional outcomes (Colvin, 2007; Haras & McEvoy, 2005; Harmon, 2006; Heys & Wawryznksi, 2013; Mastroleo et al., 2008; Nisbet et al., 2014; Owen, 2011; Ruane & Lee, 2016). In this regard, scholars harness the accepted knowledge base associated with peer education to justify and validate the proliferation of peer support roles, particularly in the context of increasing budget scrutiny.

Across these varied deployments of the terms *peer education* and *peer educator,* we see efforts to consolidate the spurious practice of instituting peer-to-peer support into a recognized and grounded professional connotation. Yet, as we noted earlier, the continued prevalence of descriptor terms used in reference to *peer education*

makes it an increasingly opaque terrain to navigate and understand. Despite sustained awareness and criticism about the absence of a commonly accepted convention for classifying peer education roles (Brack et al., 2010; Breslin et al., 2018; Budge, 2006; Williams, 2011a; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Cuseo, 2010; Dawson et al., 2014; Falchikov, 2001; Smith, 2013; Stigmar, 2016) and others' attempts to fill this void (e.g., Cuseo, 2010, Ender & Newton, 2000; Jacobi, 1991; Newton & Ender, 2010; Smith, 2013; Terrion & Leonard, 2007), we still lack conceptual clarity about what types of programmatic roles and functions come together to constitute what it means to be a peer educator on a college campus.

Furthermore, acknowledging the accumulation of names, Smith (2013) asserted there is a "common identity and role underlying these diverse titles" (p. 2) that warrants clarification of terminology and further consideration for operationalizing a broader construct of understanding. While Smith and other colleagues (e.g., Cuseo, 2010; Keup, 2016; Terrion & Leonard, 2007) have led the way in these efforts, their work suggests the use of alternative naming conventions, such as *peer leader* and *peer mentor*, to serve as an overarching unitary concept which fails to align with the field's widely accepted referencing of Newton and Ender's (2010) construct of *peer education*. It is our intent to fill this void by examining the literature in relation to this construct to determine areas of congruence that frame the peer educator role as a unifying concept and further distinguish it from other notable peer positions. For this, we turn to a closer examination of terms most commonly referenced in relation to *peer education: peer tutor, peer facilitator, peer educator, peer leader, peer advisor,* and *peer mentor*. Through our analysis, we identified elements of commonality across the ways in which these differing terms were defined with respect to the nature of the peer-helping-peer role. The discussion that follows delineates the role of a peer educator in terms of the shared qualities and characteristics that serve to distinguish them as formal peer-helping-peer roles. In doing so, we assert a set of standards drawn from the literature that serve to substantiate a framework for understanding the nature and function of peer education as a professional field of practice within the field of higher education. In tandem with this discussion, we outline the professional contexts in which these roles are implemented in order to map the common titles used in specific domains and bridge existing terminologies to a central, unitary concept.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A PEER?
Across the literature the term *peer* is juxtaposed to several context-specific terms referencing undergraduate helping roles across college campuses such as *advisor, counselor,*

mentor, tutor, leader, facilitator, to mention only a few. Just as a contextual term connotes a particular understanding of the nature and responsibilities of a role, the use of *peer* as an adjective offers relational or contextual information about the individual. In the college setting, an important function of the term peer is to differentiate the role from professional positions that share name resemblance, yet traditionally have extensive educational and experiential expertise for facilitating undergraduate student learning and development. For example, academic coaches and advisors traditionally play prominent roles in advancing undergraduate student success through their advocacy and counsel of individual students and their broader leadership of retention initiatives across campus. Although peer coaches and peer advisors contribute to these goals, the role of coaches and advisors requires more formal credentials and is more expansive to include supervision of the undergraduate peers as an extension of their own influential positions.

So, what does it mean to be considered a peer? In general, scholars have defined a *peer* in terms of both physical characteristics and personal attributes but maintain that the status is recognized situationally and contingent upon students' own conceptions of likeness (Brack et al., 2010; Gould & Lomax, 1993). Brack et al. (2010), for example, signified a peer as being of the same social group and standing as those they are educating, foregrounding the importance of community membership in the identification of peers. Gould and Lomax (1993) further described that a peer can vary dependent on the "demographic profiles of each campus or student group," noting that "variables such as age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, status, life experience, and group allegiance contribute to defining who is perceived as 'equal'" (p. 236). Central to these definitions is the understanding that identity is a complex construct through which multiple characteristics intersect and contribute to how individuals perceive others as similar to and or different from themselves.

Although identity is one way to signify likeness, relational attributes also appear in definitions of peers. Sanft et al. (2008), for example, described a peer as "a friend, a colleague, [or] a fellow student" (p. 5) suggesting an experiential reciprocity between individuals. In her research on peer leaders, Haber (2011) extended this notion of mutuality by suggesting a non-hierarchical interaction between peers that obscures the delineation of leader and follower. Stigmar (2016) further contextualized the peer in relation to the role of the professional educator: "Anyone who is of a similar status as the person being tutored and operates as a complement and active partner with university teachers in the process of learning and teaching" (p. 124). These descriptions raise questions about how

issues of relatability and authority factor into how peer status and standing are construed by campus stakeholders.

Questions surrounding the extent of similarity shared between students is yet another lens through which we can examine the definition of a peer. Falchikov (2001) argued that the "degree to which students are truly 'peers' varies across the range of possible peer tutoring applications" (p. 1), citing differences in the learning context as well as participant status and roles as contributing factors in how a peer tutor is situated in relation to the student being tutored, resulting in a continuum of peerness ranging from same-level, equal status to cross-level, unequal status (pp. 8-9). Colvin and Ashman (2010), for instance, acknowledged that peer mentors are generally more experienced, though not necessarily distanced in academic standing, whereas peer tutors and Supplemental Instruction (SI) leaders are often in more advanced degree statuses than the lower-division students they support. Brack et al. (2010) further suggested that the professional preparation of peer educators creates a false premise of peer standing noting "previous research suggests that training to become a peer educator alters participants, perhaps making them less peers and more educators after training" (p. 566).

Conceding that the variety of ways to define a peer is not sufficient for signifying the responsibilities of the role, Newton and Ender (2010) called for the point of emphasis to be on defining the term through the characteristics of a "helper—someone who is more knowing, more experienced, or more capable than people being helped" (p. 6) and are formally titled by a campus designee's appointment or selection to serve, thereby further distinguishing their peer capacity from non-formal relationships. In recognition of these important differences in status that extend credibility to the peer educator role, Smith (2013) contended that the term "near-peers" (p. 2) is a more accurate descriptor for recognizing the qualifications, training, and experience of students assuming these supportive roles. Across these considerations of how a peer is defined, there is an important emphasis placed on programmatic contextualization, suggesting that while peer status may be defined through unique identifiers or personal attributes, such as demographics, interests and/or helping skills, as well as relational characteristics like academic status and experiences, program administrators must take into account the appropriateness of likeness characteristics for the specific scope and aims of the peer education program.

HOW IS THE ROLE OF A PEER EDUCATOR DEFINED?

Beyond the recognition of peer status, the role of peer educators is defined by scholars across four broad domains

of practice: service, training, relationships, and outcomes. Although not consistently integrated into a cohesive framework and operationalized across distinct applications, these elements are frequently referenced by authors as they describe the nature and function of peer educator positions. In the following paragraphs we discuss each element in relation to the ways in which it is framed in the literature.

An initial observation to make is that peer educators have well-defined roles within curricular and co-curricular programs that are grounded in intentional goals. Williams (2011a) described quality peer educator programs as being "anchored in institutional priorities and [recognized] as partners in advancing their institution's mission, and thoughtfully integrated with a broader initiative such as a rich student activities program or a targeted academic support program" (p. 4). The expansion of the peer educator role from its earliest conceptions of tutors and resident advisors to academic and career consultants reflects the steadfast prominence of this practice to the educational mission of colleges and universities (Williams, 2011a). Today, peer educators are increasingly recognized as an established component of a variety of initiatives identified as high-impact practices (HIPs) for promoting student success (Keup, 2016). Through their integration into HIPs, peer educators support the educational mission of colleges and universities by promoting student learning and development as well as retention and persistence (Williams, 2011a; Keup, 2016; Tinto, 1993).

While Keup (2016) and Williams (2011a) denoted that the specific scope of responsibilities of peer educators are largely defined by the sponsoring campus entity, Ender and Newton (2000) described more broadly that the peer educator offers "educational services to their peers…designed to assist in the adjustment, satisfaction, and persistence of students toward attainment of their educational goals" (p. 1). Inherent in this definition is the expansive presence of peer education across the college experience ranging from scaffolding transitions, promoting experiential fulfillment, and motivating students' self-actualization. While peer educators may differ in their modes of engagement (i.e., from individual to group facilitation) (Cuseo, 2010; Newton & Ender, 2010; Shook & Keup, 2012), they "support[s] students as they explore, identify, and apply problem-solving strategies to resolve everyday problems and challenges that occur in the student maturation process" (Ender & Newton, 2000, p. 1). Furthermore, they are characterized by the instructional nature through which they build rapport and partner with students to foster their development. Often operationalized using descriptive terms to denote the active role played, Ender and Newton (2000) noted that

peer educators assist, coach, problem solve, encourage, model, and support, whereas Brack et al. (2010) added they "counsel, provide information, and conduct outreach programs" (p. 566). Across these activities, the teaching and learning exchange appears central to the scope of responsibilities shared across peer educator roles.

Another notable attribute of peer educators is the paraprofessional competency they bring to their roles (Catanzarite & Robinson, 2013). They are well trained with specified domains of knowledge and skills and participate in ongoing professional development and supervision which serves to formalize and differentiate the role from more casual peer-to-peer interactions (Keup, 2016). Brack et al. (2010) explained that the efficacy of peer educators stems from their unique balance of peerness and professionalism: "[Peer] educators can be powerful role models because, by definition, they are colleagues to their peers, and by virtue of their training, are prepared to assist and influence others" (p. 568). The nature of such training varies depending on the role assumed. Findings from Keup's (2016) national survey of peer leaders (n=1,972) noted a range in both format and structure, with roughly 40% of respondents indicating training periods extending two days or less, and approximately 60% of respondents reporting training lasting one week or longer through extended semester-long in-service professional development. Despite this range, Gould and Lomax (1993) asserted, "The greater complexity of the skills one wants peer educators to practice, the more extensive should be the training" (p. 236). In general, scholars call for training that is comprehensive and systematically organized to scaffold the peer educators' involvement throughout the program, occurring on an annual or semester basis and consistent with ongoing professional oversight (Williams, 2011b; Gould & Lomax, 1993; Newton & Ender, 2010; Wawrzynski et al., 2011). At a minimum, peer educators should have general knowledge and skills for interpersonal communication, relationship building, referral practices, and principles of diversity and inclusion, in addition to competencies designated by their specific contextual role, for example, content facilitation skills for tutoring (Dadonna, 2011; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Newton & Ender, 2010).

To align with best practices within the field, trainings should be developed from guidelines set by leading professional organizations for peer education. Currently, there are three national organizations leading the way in recognizing standards of excellence in peer education: CRLA; NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education; and the International Center for Supplemental Instruction at the University of Missouri Kansas City. While each entity offers a specific approach to program development, they collectively offer a rigorous heuristic for quality of

peer educator programs that is grounded in intentionally designed and continuous training and supervision.

CRLA's (2018) International Tutor Training Program Certification and the International Peer Educator Training Program Certification outline the minimum standards for developing high-quality tutoring and peer education programs, including criteria for tutor/peer educator selection, training, experiential work, and evaluation. Supervisors may apply for up to three levels of program certification: Certified Tutor/Peer Educator, Certified Advanced Tutor/Peer Educator, and Certified Master Tutor/Peer Educator. In order to achieve Level 1 certification, programs must demonstrate a minimum of 10 or 15 hours of training for tutors and peer educators, respectively. In addition, programs are required to develop and implement intentionally designed trainings on a variety of topics that are foundational competencies such as professional ethics, roles and responsibilities, communication skills, rapport building and facilitation techniques, referral skills, and theories of student learning and development. Programs seeking advanced and master levels of certification must meet additional training topic requirements as well as extended hours of training and direct experience (CRLA, 2018).

The Certified Peer Educator Training (CPE) sponsored by NASPA's BACCHUS Initiatives (n.d.-a) provides a comprehensive training curriculum that supervisors can adopt for their peer education programs. The twelve-hour CPE training consists of eight modules on topics ranging from leadership skills, programming and group facilitation, as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. A central focus of the curriculum is geared towards scaffolding peer educators' capacities for leading changes in student behavior and promoting campus civility and engagement (NASPA, n.d.-a). Upon completion of the curriculum, peer educators take a national competency exam to become certified.

Supplemental Instruction programs can be accredited through the International Center for Supplemental Instruction at the University of Missouri Kansas City. Different from certifications who offer general guidelines to promote best practices for unique peer education programs, the International Center for Supplemental Instruction's (2020) accreditation serves as a verification of campus program fidelity to UMKC's international model. To achieve accreditation, programs must adhere to the core principles of the model which include supervisor training from the International Center; intensive training and supervision of SI leaders; a formal session planning and observation process; and the maintenance of minimum standards for program outcomes, including class and session attendance.

An additional element that further defines the role of the peer educator is the structural processes and nature of relationships formed by the peer-to-peer interactions fostered by the sponsoring programmatic models. Although peer educators may differ in their participation schemes (Cuseo, 2010; Ender & Kay, 2001; Keup, 2016; Newton & Ender, 2010), their interactions span curricular and co-curricular contexts including inside the classroom in capacities such as first-year seminar facilitators and course-embedded peer tutors, and outside the classroom as resident advisors, peer mentors, among others. The nature of such work is collaborative, student-centered, and often driven by the task or relational expectations of their respective programs. The longevity of these formal peer-to-peer relationships is also driven programmatically and closely tied to the experiential progression and maturation of students. For example, a peer tutor may work with a student throughout the duration of one semester whereas a peer mentor may extend over a longer period of time. In addition to the peer connection, they are commonly viewed as "bridges" that purposefully connect students to campus officials (Gafney & Varma-Nelson, 2007, p. 535), and further fill voids in the provision of on-campus services (Erhardt et al., 2006). They play an important role in fostering a sense of community among students, faculty, and staff.

Lastly, the relationship can be operationalized through the reciprocity of experiential gains achieved by peer educators and the peers they support. Through intentional scaffolding from their supervisors, peer educators learn and grow as they also facilitate the development of their peers (Keup, 2016; Newton & Ender, 2012). Past research indicates that the value-added outcomes for both peer groups range across cognitive and psychosocial dimensions and often influence holistic gains in student development and increased student persistence (Keup, 2016; Tinto, 1993), resulting in increasing recognition for being a "high impact choice for involvement" (Williams, 2011a, p. 4). Throughout the literature, *peer educators* are consistently defined in terms of their outcomes with particular recognition to the institutional gains afforded by their services and the influential impact of their work on student development.

HOW IS A PEER EDUCATOR DIFFERENT FROM A PEER MENTOR OR PEER LEADER?

Often most misunderstood are the differences between the terms *peer leader, peer educator,* and *peer mentor*. Differentiating among these terms helps to better clarify the various roles in which students are employed and serve on college campuses. As has been illustrated in this white paper, the term *peer educator* is a comprehensive term used to describe all types of peer-helping-peer

paraprofessional positions on college and university campuses.

In Keup's (2016) paper arguing *peer leadership* as a high-impact practice, she defined peer leadership as both paid and unpaid roles. The 1,942 respondents in the survey Keup wrote about described their various leadership roles such as *community service-related, orientation leaders,* and *residence hall assistants*. In other words, the student respondents who viewed themselves in any various types of leadership positions on a college campus might refer to themselves as a *peer leader.*

Peer mentor is another frequently used term that is often misunderstood in higher education. A position might be created within a department with the specified title *peer mentor*. Therefore, a student will be hired to serve in a position as a *peer mentor*, and the student will be given a detailed job description for the peer mentor role. But there is also the concept of being a peer mentor that colleges and universities hope for their peer educators to achieve that becomes confusing when professionals begin haphazardly interchanging the comprehensive terms *peer educator* for *peer mentor*: "A peer mentor is not just any student, but rather is a student who has learned from experience and has developed skills to successfully guide other students through college" (Sanft et al., 2008, p. 5). A genuine peer mentoring relationship may develop organically in an informal setting between peers without one student having been assigned to another. Moreover, a peer mentoring relationship may also develop naturally out of a situation in which one student was assigned to a peer educator in a formal setting (Sanft et al., 2008). The latter is what supervisors should strive for their peer educators to achieve with each of the peers to which they are assigned. By developing formal training programs, colleges and universities are far more likely to set their programs up for this success.

IN WHAT CONTEXTS DO PEER EDUCATORS SERVE?

As we have noted, the term *peer education* serves as a comprehensive designation over a myriad of paraprofessional peer-helping-peer positions found on college and university campuses. Whether housed in academic affairs, athletics, or student affairs, the breadth of peer education programs across the field of higher education continues to grow. Detailed below are some of the applications of peer education most commonly found on college and university campuses that advance the characteristics of peer educators we described earlier.

PEER TUTORS

Peer tutoring may be one of the oldest peer education programs and perhaps one of the largest employers of peer educators in academia. Peer tutors provide course-specific content and study skills support to undergraduate students across the curriculum. Many institutions today provide peer tutoring through a centralized campus learning center or discipline-specific departments, such as a math and/or language tutoring and writing centers (Latino & Unite, 2012). Research on peer tutoring indicates the positive gains for the student receiving tutor as well as the student serving as the tutor. Colver and Fry's (2015) study examining the efficacy of peer tutoring on the undergraduate level referenced specific peer tutoring services at the University of Granada in Spain and Eastern Washington University. It is no surprise that Colver and Fry concluded that peer tutoring programs are highly desirable for institutions of higher education and they put forth that the subject warrants further research. DeFeo and Caparas's (2014) research also noted the benefits of tutoring for the tutors themselves in their article for the *Journal of College Reading and Learning*. In their work they referenced peer tutoring programs at Raven University, specifically within the university's writing center. Among other conclusions, the authors found that "tutoring is a viable and meaningful enterprise and opportunity for professional development" (DeFeo & Caparas, p. 160).

PEER FACILITATORS

The role of the peer facilitator in the college or university classroom setting is to foster student learning (Hodges et al., 2014). Peer facilitators are often recognized in association with first-year experience seminars wherein these upper-division students serve as co-instructors alongside university faculty or staff to support students' acclimation to college life, including teaching academic learning skills and promoting social connections (Latino & Unite, 2012). Hodges et al. (2014) asserted that the position description of the peer facilitator makes it inherently beneficial for both the students serving in the role of peer facilitator and to the students being served. Due to the interactive nature of peer facilitation in the instructional setting, students serving in these roles and the students receiving help benefit from this relationship by increased feelings of institutional belonging and interpersonal awareness (Latino & Unite, 2012).

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION LEADERS

Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leaders are a subset of peer facilitators who lead out-of-class study sessions for high-risk courses. Founded by Deanna Martin in the late 1970s at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, the International Center for Supplemental Instruction (2020c) describes SI Leaders as "near peers" who complete a robust training before facilitating weekly small group collaborative, academic

sessions that help students integrate learning skills into their content studying (para. 1). Important distinctions between SI leaders and peer tutors are the integration of SI leaders into targeted courses, with required class attendance, and session planning that emphasizes active and collaborative studying (International Center for Supplemental Instruction, 2020a). SI is an internationally renowned academic support model, garnering validation from the U.S. Department of Education in the 1990s for its efficacy in promoting student persistence and retention (Dawson et al., 2014). In addition to the traditional SI model, Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), Peer Led Team Learning (PLTL), and Structured Learning Assistance (SLA) are other notable course-specific support programs that utilize peer educators (Wilson & Arendale, 2011). There is an extensive body of scholarship examining the effects of these course-embedded peer learning programs on student success outcomes, for both students and peer educators, in addition to the institutional benefits (see Arendale, 2020).

PEER ACADEMIC COACHES

Peer academic coaching programs have gained momentum in recent years within campus learning centers and in programs designed to assist with at-risk student populations. Peer academic coaching programs were born from success coaching programs that found their way into higher education in the early 2000s (Robinson, 2015). Peer academic coaches offer their peers success strategies to enhance students' academic decision making and study habits, while providing holistic support based on their "emotional, social, and academic knowledge" (Grabsch et al., 2020, p. 2). Latino and Unite (2012) noted the emphasis on trusting relationships in the academic coaching model as they describe the peer academic coach's role as one of an academic motivator and mentor.

PEER ADVISORS

Peer advising programs are becoming increasingly common in centralized and decentralized academic advising programs (National Academic Advising Association, 2004). At Temple University, for example, the Temple University Academic Advisor Group (AAG) Mentoring Program was established as a result of a rising advising population due to new programmatic initiatives at the institutional level (Farber, 2018). Peer advising programs vary with regard to the students they serve and the departments in which they work, and there is much flexibility in designing these programs. For example, peer advisors can be trained to work with a generalized population on a drop-in basis, in a residence hall lobby, or with an at-risk population of students (Koring, 2005). Their responsibilities often include facilitating students' major exploration, assisting with course registration, informally reviewing degree audits,

and providing initial counseling for post-college aspirations (Latino & Unite, 2012).

RESIDENT ADVISORS, ASSISTANTS, AND COUNSELORS

Departments of residence life and housing are among the largest employers of students on college campuses. Students serving as paraprofessionals in residence halls are commonly referred to as resident advisors, assistants, and counselors. Their position descriptions vary from campus to campus, but these student employees are generally required "to live within a residence hall and provide leadership for a floor or floor section" (Benjamin & Davis, 2016, p. 14). These paraprofessional student employees are at the core of any housing and residence life program (Blimling, 2015).

PEER HEALTH EDUCATORS

College and university paraprofessional programs related to physical and mental health have seen a rise in recent years (Latino & Unite, 2012). Although institutions of higher education offer professional services for their students, there is often a need for immediacy that the professionals cannot provide due to a lack of staffing. Consequently, peer education programs have been established in counseling and health centers out of a rising demand for additional assistance in these high-need areas. Although specific roles vary, peer health educators often provide educational workshops and individual or small group counseling (Dennett & Azar, 2011). After receiving copious training, student paraprofessionals are offering listening ears to their peers who are have such concerns as eating disorders, sexual assault histories, intimacy issues, HIV risk/prevention questions, and transition questions (Sharkin et al., 2003). Despite distinct subject matter, their role is similar to that of peer academic coaches who provide a relationship for mentoring positive student behaviors.

The Future of Peer Education

Though peer education has been in practice for decades and has experienced steady growth over the past twenty years, it has yet to have been established as a specific field within higher education. Williams (2011b) observed that while the use of peer educators on college and university campuses continues to expand, "the building of a body of work that makes peer education programs an unassailable part of the landscape is still in progress" (p. 97). Peer education should be acknowledged as a high-impact practice considering the benefits it provides to the students it serves, to the peer educators themselves, and to the institutional bottom line through retention and persistence (Keup, 2016). Given these observations, peer education should be recognized as its own specific field

within the broader higher education arena; practitioners should be encouraged to adhere to and strengthen the standards for best practices in the field, seek out and contribute to shared understandings related to existing certifications provided by professional organizations, and actively participate in train-the-trainer opportunities.

Professional organizations in higher education have for decades provided practitioners best practices and various training opportunities in the field of peer education through their certifications, conferences, programs, and institutes. Leaders in the field of peer education have called for the professionalization of the practice through such organizational affiliations. Williams (2011b) stated, "Supervisors must be trained and allowed to experiment with programs that best first a need and an institution" (p. 98). Described below are various ways in which international and national centers and organizations are supporting such development.

As referenced earlier, CRLA's International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC) and International Peer Educator Training Program Certification (IPTPC) certify tutor and peer educator training programs in institutions of higher education. Once certified, those programs have the authority to recognize their tutors and peer educators as having met the approved ITTPC or IPTPC training program requirements at regular, advanced, or master levels (CRLA, 2018). CRLA ITTPC leaders and reviewers developed a Standards, Outcomes, and Assessments documents for their Levels 1, 2, and 3 of training (Schotka et al., 2014; Schotka et al., 2015) to "identify the knowledge and skills that tutors should acquire in their training and preparation" (Schotka et al., 2015, p. 2). During the CRLA Annual Conference, IPTPC and ITTPC leaders provide best practice sessions for professionals desiring to develop or enhance tutor and peer education training programs on their campuses. Since 2016, CRLA has offered an intensive Summer Institute for Tutor and Mentor Trainers intended "to provide attendees with the training and tools for developing programs for peer educators and tutors that meet professional standards and best practices" (CRLA, 2020, Program Highlights, para. 1).

In 2013, the BACCHUS Network joined forces with NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Educator to create the BACCHUS Initiatives of NASPA (Arnold, 2015). Serving a field of more than 15,000 student affairs professionals, NASPA's far reach has helped to provide standards for program development and peer educator training for health and wellness peer education programs (NASPA, n.d.-a). The core of the BACCHUS Initiatives of NASPA is its Certified Peer Educator (CPE) Training. CPE Training provides practitioners with the tools to create programs on their campuses and with the training resources to help students develop the skills to become successful in their roles as peer health educators. The BACCHUS Initiatives of NASPA also provides an annual institute for collegiate peer health education advisors, a yearly General Assembly for peer educators and supervisors to engage in conversations about "health, safety, and student leadership," and NASPA regional organization peer education conferences and institutes for collaboration and networking (NASPA, n.d.-b, NASPA Virtual General Assembly, para. 1).

Under the umbrella of the Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) with CRLA is the Association for the Coaching and Tutoring Profession (ACTP). The ACTP offers several certification opportunities for college and university tutors, coaches, and trainers: Tutor Certification, Tutor Trainer Certification, Academic Coach Certification, and Peer Academic Coach Certification. These certifications are aligned with the mission of ACTP (n.d.), which is "committed to the development of a successful learner" (Our Mission section, para.1).

The International Center for Supplemental Instruction (2020a; 2020b) offers professional development opportunities for programs seeking SI accreditation and for currently accredited SI programs. SI Leader Certification is also available for paraprofessionals seeking an additional challenge. The Center provides both online and on-site training for trainers, on-site training for SI leaders, and multiple webinar opportunities for SI leaders and for trainers. Furthermore, the Center has hosted biennial professional international conferences since the early 2000s and has conferences planned into 2024.

For more than a decade, the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (n.d.) has hosted the Institute on Peer Educators. Designed for practitioners, this engaging meeting provides professionals with the opportunity to learn from experts in the field of peer education. Upon completion of this biennial institute, participants will have developed an action plan for development of their own peer education program.

Closing Thoughts

When initially tasked with writing this white paper, our aim was to focus on the terminological aspect. Although that remained at the core of our research, what we discovered was what we had anecdotally known through our own professional work with peer educators on our campuses: peer education is a robust, diverse practice across colleges and universities and yet, it is not, itself, known as a recognized field within higher education. As demonstrated

in this white paper, peer education has experienced tremendous growth over the past few decades and is recognized across research and professional organizations, nationally and internationally, as a noteworthy endeavor for enhancing college experiences and outcomes; however, we suspect the terminology associated with peer education is still astonishingly misunderstood by college and university faculty, staff, and administration which limits its renown as a high-impact practice.

Our general recommendation to the higher education community is to find common ground with regard to paraprofessional peer-helping-peer positions on all areas of campus—from academic affairs to student affairs—and to recognize these positions under the one umbrella term of *peer education*. Our more specific recommendation to our college and university practitioner colleagues is to affiliate with professional organizations offering best practices and training opportunities for peer educators and supervisors. By providing better training to the students and to the trainers, we will create more sustainable programs for our campuses.

A lengthier discussion of the various peer education programs found at institutions of higher education worldwide and of the future of peer education extends far beyond the length of this paper. However, we are hopeful this is the starting point of a continued conversation about the benefits of peer education to the students they serve, the campuses they work on, and to the peer educators themselves.

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