Peer leaders help students

AURA ALTAMIRANDA
Contributing Writers

One of the largest programs in the country, comes from the University’s biology department.

Peer Lead Team Learning is a national program with a number of participating universities designed to reinforce principles taught in various disciplines of biology.

Thomas Pitzer initially brought the program to the University in 2000 when its only courses the program offered aid in were Biology I and II.

A little more than a decade after its inception, it has grown to serve approximately 2,500 students at the Modesto Maidique and Biscayne Bay campuses in the following biology courses: General Biology I, General Biology II, Genetics, Fundamentals of Human Physiology, Human Biology, Ecology, Evolution and Neurobiology.

The staff is working to implement Intro to Microbiology as well as General Microbiology into the course offerings. Alberto Cruz, assistant coordinator, said, “It is pretty difficult for someone to get a degree in bio or a minor without participating in PLTL.”

PLTL is a network of students helping students understand difficult concepts in course material.

While the incentive of the program as a student is to better grasp the course content, most professors

Program members provide tutoring in various course materials

further encourage students to participate by using completion of PLTL as a replacement for the cumulative final exam.

To accommodate students who cannot commute to campus, scheduled discussions are led through smaller online sections using a web conferencing tool Adobe Connect.

The commitment of the program is similar to that of juggling an additional class but its work is intertwined with the subject it reinforces. During the first five minutes of every session, leaders administer readiness surveys to students to foster engagement.

Once a student misses three or more, he can no longer earn credit for the program. After the surveys, leaders facilitate discussions based on course material that has been covered. Their purpose is not to teach material, but to review.

Nataly Rodriguez, assistant coordinator, described PLTL as “active learning,” which serves as additional aid to the “passive learning” of lectures and textbook reading.

Omar Fernandez, a sophomore biology major, who initially took PLTL for Bio 1, leads discussions for General Biology I.

“What goes on in a session motivates most of them to study for the next. We have surveys at the beginning that contribute and motivate them to know more about the material,” he said.

Most universities with smaller programs have the funding to pay their leaders, with the exception of staff.

We’ve been doing PLTL for over 10 years and research shows that students who take PLTL earn a full grade higher than those who don’t.

Nataly Rodriguez, assistant coordinator
Peer Lead Team Learning

We’ve been doing PLTL for over 10 years and research shows that students who take PLTL earn a full grade higher than those who don’t,” she added.

There are plans for expansion. Joseph Albite, head coordinator, expects that more administrative support will allot time for research about how to further improve the program.

The PLTL staff hopes with more acknowledgment, will come more awareness and involvement in the program.