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Group Development for Transformational Change: co-creating and co-developing an efficient peer advisor team at San Diego State University using the group analysis system BART and Feminist Leadership

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Abstract

Current leadership development programs often neglect the development of group leadership, especially when working with a culturally diverse group. The purpose of this study was to enhance my ability to lead a group of student advisors currently enrolled in the Counseling and Social Change Program at San Diego State University. The data gathering process included surveys, a review of documents, a formal peer advisor training, and a reflective focus group. Through this process and grounded in feminist and group relations theory I worked both with the student advisors and the director of the program to develop a successful team dynamic. I specifically used the group analysis system BART and a Feminist Leadership lens to develop both the individual students and the group. This combination resulted in the most efficient peer advisor cohort the Counseling and Social Change program has seen.

Developing Efficient Peer Advisors Through Team Bonding, Effective Training and

Mentorship

This project has challenged me to analyze not only the reasons behind why I choose this topic but also to reflect on my own personal values both as a student and as a student affair's professional. This study will be framed around the values of mentorship, service, work ethic, empowerment, inclusion, compassion and commitment to higher education.

My personal journey through higher education has been, for the most part long and difficult. I started as an undocumented community college student in 2006, when faculty and staff had little knowledge and even less interest in students like me. Along with my undocumented status, I carried with me a life of trauma whose sequels showed up in my everyday life. Determined to one day graduate from college I started asking questions, looking for resources and trying to figure out my place within the system. I was able to get residency soon after enrolling in community college, however a message had already been ingrained in me; the system was not equipped to meet my needs. I stubbornly drifted in and out of community college for nine years and finally transferred to San Diego State University (SDSU, or San Diego State) in the Fall of 2015. It was at San Diego State that I was finally able to find my place within a system I had always been in conflict with, but at the same time had saved me by giving meaning and a glimmer of hope to my life.

It was also at San Diego State that I recognized within me as well as experienced the value of mentorship, service, work ethic, empowerment, inclusion and compassion –the same values that now frame this action research, along with my commitment to higher education. While at SDSU I served in the executive board of multiple student organizations, held various volunteer positions in the community, became a peer advisor, and more importantly met

incredible mentors. It was within the context of serving, that I found my passion for student affairs. While all the values listed above have an equal weight in how I will carry myself in my career and in how I conduct my relationship with students, it is worth mentioning that work ethic is especially important. I, along with many others have crossed paths with unconcerned and unprepared professionals and this experience has been detrimental to our educational success; for this reason, this study will give special consideration to work ethic.

Choosing the participants of this study was really, an easy task because out of all the amazing organizations I was able to be a part of at SDSU, the Counseling and Social Change Program has been the most transformative in my life. Consequently, this study will be centered around a group of students who play a vital role in the success of the program: The Counseling and Social Change Peer Advisors. Reflecting on my time as a peer advisor and then as a graduate mentor this study will seek to answer the following question: How can I better prepare Counseling and Social Change Peer Advisors meet the needs of a diverse student population at SDSU? Additional questions that will help frame my cycles are how can I become a more efficient graduate mentor? How can I improve the current training methods? How can I use leadership development theories to encourage team efficacy?

Background

While reviewing the literature four themes presented themselves as vital to accessing, retaining, and empowering students in higher education. The emergent themes are as follows: mentoring and a positive relationship with faculty and institutions; the availability of diverse faculty/staff to mentor students; culturally competent coursework; and access to support programs and student organizations. All these components facilitate a sense of belonging that is of utmost importance for students', especially of color, ability to imagine their selves thriving and advancing

in higher education (McMahan, Hardwood, & Hickey-Moody, 2016; Cavazos, 2016; Barker, 2011; Apprey, Preston-Grimes, Bassett, Lowis, & Rideau, 2014). The Counseling and Social Change Program's curriculum along with its faculty is committed to providing this type of support to all of its students.

Mentoring in higher education is especially important to development of academics, however for many students, especially for students of color and students in marginalized community's barriers to higher education begin in K-12 education. McMahon, Hardwood, and Hickey-Moody (2016) argue that by investigating how young people who are not currently in school imagine universities they are able to provide new insights into barriers students face in their journey to higher education. Additionally, their findings suggest that negative teacher-student relationships have a profound impact on how young people are able to imagine what universities are like, and these experiences deter students from attending. If negative experiences during primary education can deter students from participating in higher education, then as future student services professionals, lecturers, and mentors it is our responsibility to foster positive and empowering relationships with the students that do make it to college regardless of previous negative experiences or assumptions. In addition to being able to "imagine" a positive university environment, students need to be able to see themselves reflected, supported and represented in a higher education environment. Cavazos (2016) attributes the success of underrepresented students, specifically of Latinos/as in academia to mentors and multiethnic coursework. He explains that students who developed a sense of belonging and pursued masters and doctoral programs was because of their mentors. This happened especially, when their mentors were other Latinos/as in academia, highlighting the importance of young people being able to see

themselves reflected in the university context as well as having positive relationships with their

professors and mentors.

Moreover, connectedness is not only important in relation to mentors, but to the course

work as well. Students need to be able to see themselves and their experiences in their texts, and

that's where multicultural education becomes imperative to the development of academics of

color. Diversity has certainly been a buzz word in the educational setting for the past few years.

It has been used to describe both people and curricula, but how it is being defined is unclear.

MacDonald and Bernardo (2005) believe that the current understanding of diversity is both

limiting and superficial, thus, further marginalizing students. Instead, they propose to define

diversity as "continually expanding awareness of the dynamics of difference in regard to social

power (the pretense of a dominant culture which ignores, devalues or criticizes them because

they seem somehow different), personal perceptions, and judgments about others" (pg. 2)" By

thinking about diversity in this dynamic way we are able to include marginalized students'

competencies and experiences and center them in higher education curricula benefiting all

students. By failing to center marginalized students' competencies and experiences, current

'multicultural' education focuses on their presupposed deficiencies rather than building on their

strengths. Since cultural competence is not about becoming an expert in every culture but rather

it is a matter of flexibility and the ability to adapt to different cultural contexts, multicultural

education cannot be a detached process, where students simply read a text book to learn about

different cultures. On the contrary, it needs to be a guided personal process where one challenges

concepts of self-awareness and identity position. Multicultural education is about learning who

we are in relationship to others, allowing for mobility and flexibility in transcultural contexts

(Ochoa, McDonald, and Monk, 2016). With this in mind, multicultural education needs to be a

transformative process for both a white student and a student of color. Developing student's cultural literacy, in this way, is crucial not only to preparing truly culturally competent graduates but it also has an impact on minoritized students' experience while in college.

Campus involvement is also a factor aiding student success. Using Ogbu's (2003) Theory of Oppositional Culture and Tinto's (1987) Theory of Educational Departure as theoretical frameworks for her study Baker (2008) found that student involvement led to academic achievement among Black and Latino students, as well as an increase in students' levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment. While not all student involvement may have the same or positive effects in underrepresented students, these findings will contribute to the understanding of students of color needs in higher education, by providing their professors and mentors with an idea of how to navigate campus involvement with their students. The Counseling and Social Change program (CSC) provides a platform for students to succeed in this way by providing them with access to leadership positions through the Counseling and Social Change Club and peer advising cohort.

The concept of leadership development is definitely a big part of higher education and colleges and universities are invested in the creation of well-rounded student leaders that will be able to successfully impact society after graduation. Furthermore, Seemiller (2016) asserts that leadership competency development is a responsibility of higher education. He explains that everyone in higher education is responsible for preparing future graduates as leaders who will in turn positively contribute to society. Thus, leadership development, just like cultural competency cannot simply be a class that checks off a leadership requirement; university programs must engage students in proactive leadership positions and constantly challenge their learning. Leadership competency development should be an institution-wide approach. The Counseling

and Social Change Program is committed to precisely this level of leadership development through both the peer advising cohort and the counseling and social change club; an organic form of multicultural education through immersion theory and diverse, knowledgeable and accessible faculty to mentor students.

Context

Founded in 1897, San Diego State University (SDSU) is the oldest higher education institution and though at the beginning its curriculum was limited to English, history and mathematics it now offers 91 undergraduate majors, 76 masters' programs and 23 doctoral degree programs divided amongst its eight colleges. More importantly, it grew from a population of 91 predominately white students to a more than 36,000 beautifully diverse student population. Housed under the College of Education, the organizational setting of my research will take place in the Department of Counseling and School Psychology at SDSU, specifically within the Counseling and Social Change Program. The CSC program is committed to facilitating individual, group and systemic change, and through its curriculum it seeks to equip its students with the skills and concepts needed to recognize the socio-cultural influences shaping human problems and to effect change in their communities. Though it is one of SDSU's newest academic programs, with over 300 students currently enrolled in the program, a student organization (the Counseling and Social Change Club or CSCC), and a group of student advisors, the CSC program is having a huge impact on campus.

My role within the program is that of Graduate Mentor; I work together with the director of the program to train and support a group of five to ten student advisors in addition to fulfilling all the responsibilities of a peer advisor. The responsibilities of the peer advisor are as follows: (1) Hold weekly office hours. (2) Advise undergraduates on the classes available to them to take

in order to complete the Counseling and Social Change Program, provide information on general graduation requirements and graduate programs. (3) Complete the necessary paperwork to officially enroll students in the CSC program. (4) Gather demographic data and enter it into the CSC data base and add students' email to the master-list. (5) Encourage students to "like" the SDSU Counseling and Social Change Facebook page and follow the Instagram account. Inform students of the purpose of these media platforms; (6) Encourage students to join the Counseling and Social Change Club; (7) Serve as a mentor to students; (8) Help create an open and welcoming environment for students to stop by and get involved. (9) Assist in the planning and implementation of outreach events such as classroom presentations and tabling events. (10) Organize the CSC Minor graduation.

This research topic is important to me for various reasons; the main one being that I am personally invested in this minor. My role as a Peer Advisor has always been at a volunteer capacity, of course, as an undergraduate student, I was part of the team, but I am now responsible for training and mentoring undergraduate students that are in turn, mentoring and assisting other undergraduate students. I volunteer six hours of my time a week because, (1) going through this minor has been a life changing experience, and, I believe that to be the case for the majority of students that enroll in it; (2) because I know the peer advisors – the five to ten undergraduate students who also volunteer their time and hold office hours weekly, play a vital role in the continuation of the minor though our outreach efforts, enrolling students, communicating with students through email and social media, and, provide a sense of belonging by creating a welcoming space into our office; (3) because the CSC program plays a vital role in the life of disenfranchised students' personal development and in creating a pipeline to graduate programs and lastly, because student advising and development is my passion. Higher education has

played a major role in my life, and it has largely shaped who I am, for this reason, I've dedicated

my adult life to the empowerment of underrepresented students by guiding them through a

system was not made for them to succeed in. My experience with and relationship to the

Counseling and Social Change Program has allowed me to develop into the professional that I

am today.

Methodology I

Since the purpose of this research is to reflect and improve my practices as an advisor and

mentor I chose Jean McNiff's Action-Reflection Cycle (1988) as a guide to design my cycles
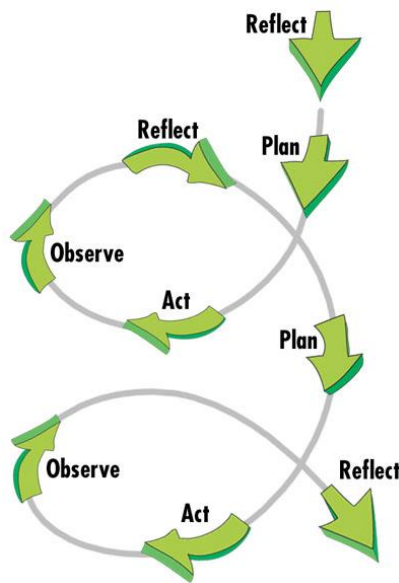
(see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Action- Reflection Cycle – Jean McNiff (1988). This figure illustrates the plan, act, observe, and reflect spiral flow of every Action-Reflection Cycle.

Initially I chose this model because I was attracted to the non-linear and non-sequential

spiral representation. It gave me comfort to realize that the process can be a little messy and that

it is okay to go back and forward and/or up and down. After doing more research on this model, I

confirmed that because this model is centered around improving your practice through critical self-reflection, it was the right model to analyze my advising and leadership development skills.

McNiff (2013) designed this model with the assumption that in action research, the researcher learns in and through action and reflection. She goes on to mention that "because action research is always to do with improving learning, and improving learning is always to do with education and personal and professional work…[it] is a powerful form of educational research." (pg. 24) Since two of the core values that informs this research are commitment to higher education and strong work ethic, it seemed fitting that I would choose an action research model that will challenge my practice and how I think about my practice; a model that is centered around constantly learning and improving. McNiff also mentions the importance of community and co-learning in this type of model. She recognizes that even though the research is centered around the self we are always in relation with people. This concept is especially important for this study as it relates to the values of mentorship, service, inclusion, and compassion which are also core values of this study. With this in mind education, learning, and improving go hand in hand in with action research, making it the perfect model to address my research question.

Needs Assessment

I have been a part of the Counseling and Social Change peer advising team for the past two academic years and I have been a part of two different peer advising cohorts. During this time, I have experienced how dedicated peer advisors work together to fulfill the responsibilities of this position and meet the needs of hundreds of students. They create magic every year by coming together in tabling events, creating a safe space for all during office hours, inspiring students from all majors to join us and, organizing a graduation like no other. However, in the midst of the

semester and the personal schedules of the peer advisors, team efficacy starts to dwindle down. Some of the behaviors I have experienced are as follows: the process of registration starts taking longer than it needs too; student applications sometimes go missing; emails go unanswered; other administrative tasks begin to be ignored; peer advisors start cancelling office hours and being absent to meetings and, outreach events fall through. Sadly, I must admit that I have also played a role in this. First, as peer advisor I did fall into the cycle of sometimes neglecting my role. Then, as a graduate mentor and peer advisor, even though I committed myself to fulfilling my role in its entirety and the entire time, I watched the peer advisors that I helped train fall in the same "cycle" I have been witnessing the last four semesters and I did little to stop it.

Reflecting on both my leadership development over the last two years and the current training and the peer advisor (PA) role description, I have identified a few points to focus during this study. Regarding the current training and role description: there is no clear written attendance policy for either meetings or office hours; there is no clear written guidelines for office work when not advising students; there is no clear expectations for how many classroom presentations, tabling events, and social events are expected per semester. Comparatively, regarding my leadership development the following came up: how can I be better at helping the PA's manage their academic, professional, social and volunteer commitments? How can I improve the peer advising training currently in place? How can I effectively communicate with them when objectives are not being met? How can I help the team avoid the recurring cycle I have been experiencing?

I have been working closely with the director of the minor, Dr. Sarah Kahn and she has been extremely supportive of the process and the direction this study is taking. She attributes a lot of the success of the minor to the peer advising team and is excited that I have chosen this for my research. Moving forward she acknowledges that in the past she has been very relaxed about her

expectations however, as the program is becoming more and more prevalent in the department, she recognizes the need for a more structured leadership team. Additionally, I want to recognize that the past two peer advising cohorts to have been compassionate, understanding and have formed strong bonds with one another naturally, owing to this, one of my central concerns is how can I keep this while fostering a more efficient peer advising team.

Along with the support of Dr. Kahn, the input of my critical friends will be crucial especially in providing me with objective criticism, as Dr. Kahn and myself may be inclined to be biased towards our current practices due to our personal relationship to the program. At the same time, a potential limitation of their analysis may be the lack of connection they will have both to the study and to the program. Negotiating the validity of my findings through the input of these two sources is something that still needs to be figured out. Moreover, an important limitation I foresee is the different meaning and/or level of importance the peer advisors will give to my values. Specifically, as it relates to work ethics and commitment to higher education since these are central to my personal journey.

Methodology II

During the Spring semester of 2018 all students registered in the CSC minor who were not graduating were invited to apply to be part of the 2018-2019 peer advisor cohort. Ten students applied; ten interviewed and five were invited to become peer advisors. The five selected students along with four returning Peer Advisors, including myself formed the 2018-19 peer advisor cohort. The peer advisors received a formal email inviting them to be a part of the study. The email clearly stated that should they refuse to participate in the study, their position as peer advisors will not be jeopardized. The study consisted of a pre-cycle and three cycles. I designed this study to be completed over the course of one semester; I chose Fall Semester 2018

to start it. Upon IRB approval I began my pre-cycle and the review of documents. Followed by

my first cycle at the end of the summer, my second cycle in the middle of the semester and the

last cycle the week before finals.

Pre-Cycle

      Plan. Being that work ethic is one of my most salient values and based on my past

observations regarding dependability and team efficacy, restructuring the current peer advisor

training was a priority. As a part of my pre-cycle I created a survey (see appendix A for complete

survey) designed to gather data on the experiences of previous peer advisors. The survey focused

specifically on the effectiveness of the training methods at the time, their opinion on the

effectiveness of their team to fulfill their overall responsibilities, and how supported they felt

though the semester. The survey also asked if they would like to suggest any changes. This

survey was imperative because even though I have been a part of the process for two years, I

want to make sure that it is not only my observations that shape the cycles of this study but also

that I validate the experiences of at least the past advisors who decide to participate in the survey.

The survey responses however were important not only to validate my observation regarding the

need for change but to help me understand how it needed to change to best help the students

thrive in their roles.

      Reflection. I emailed the survey to a total of thirteen past peer advisors all of whom

served in the past three years and four of them responded. Since one of my objectives was to

identify the areas of the training that needed improvement I asked: *I wish the peer advisor*

training was would have been more successful in… and 22 statements about specific aspects of

the training to which the peer advisors would answer *strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree,*

disagree, and strongly disagree (see appendix A). All four of the peer advisors answered

strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree to the following statements: (1) teaching me how to maintain the email account, (2) teaching me how to help students in the interdisciplinary major, (3) explaining what a RAAR is, (4) teaching me how to fill out a RAAR, (5) explaining when to submit a RAAR to academic advising, (6) teaching me how to update the student database, (7) teaching me what information belongs in the database, and (8) explaining special projects requirements. I decided to include *somewhat agree* answers and not only *strongly agree and agree* because they speak to the less developed aspects of the training, a need for improvement. Overall, previous peer advisors identified a need for structure, clear expectations and further training in specific tasks like managing the email account, helping interdisciplinary major students, and special projects among other topics. Peer advisors also identified a need for more access to either the director of the program or me throughout the week one student identified shadowing sessions with myself or the director of the program and consistent check-ins as vital for the formation of the peer advisors. The survey responses reflected my own experiences as a peer advisor, and it validated the majority of the concerns outlined in the *Needs Assessment* portion of this paper. From this survey the following overarching themes were identified and used to restructure the peer advisor training: a need for clear expectations, guided instructions, and more face to face mentorship from the formal leadership.

 Action. With these themes in mind, I proposed writing a Peer Advisor Constitution, creating specialized roles for each peer advisor and revising and restructuring the peer advisor training. The director of the minor, a returning peer advisor and I worked together to accomplish these tasks.

 Counseling and Social Change Peer Advisor Constitution. This document was co-created with the director of the Counseling and Social Change Program and a returning peer

advisor, with the purpose of creating structure and cohesion around the overall program vision, the peer advisor mission statement, general peer advising norms, and specialized roles. This was all captured in the following six articles that comprised this document:

Article I   Counseling and Social Change Program Vision
Article II Peer Advisors' Mission Statement
Article III Peer Advisors' Objectives
Article IV Peer Advisors' Responsibilities
Article V Peer Advisors' Position Descriptions
Article VI Counseling and Social Change Program Agreement

Developed Specialized Role Descriptions. In hopes of creating a productive peer advisor team, and one where the work responsibilities is equally divided amongst its members, efforts have been made in the past by the director of the minor to delegate responsibilities through job assignments. However, these assignments had been informally appointed and the advisors were not given clear direction as to how to go about completing their tasks. Given that this uncertainty also came across in the survey and wanting to address the need for clear expectations and instruction expressed in the survey, we decided to create six specialized roles to meet the needs of the program. The newly developed positions are as follows: campus outreach coordinator, classroom presentation coordinator, community college outreach coordinator, data analyst, secretary and social media coordinator, and special events coordinator/CSCC liaison. In addition to evenly and officially dividing tasks amongst the team, these roles also are also designed to develop the students' leadership capabilities and professional development. These positions were not imposed on the peer advisors, but they were invited to express interest in their top two choices. With the exception of the data analyst role, which was created and reserved for me, we decided as a whole team who was the best fit for each position on the last day of training.

Revise and Restructure the Peer Advisor Training. The structure of the peer advisor training has changed from semester to semester. When I first began as a peer advisor my training consisted of three individual shadowing sessions with a current peer advisor and two full group training sessions over summer. The following year the shadowing sessions were eliminated and only the summer training sessions remained. Wanting to address all three of the themes that emerged: the need for clear expectations, guided instructions, and more face to face time with leadership, this year we decided to add a third day of training. In total, the training consisted in three 3-hour trainings. Developing a strong and efficient peer advising team was a main motive for restructuring the training, nevertheless we wanted to make sure that team effectiveness did not come at the cost of the community and connectedness that formed in past cohorts. With this in mind we decided that the first day of training was going to focus strongly on community and team building and that the following two sessions, though they would be more task oriented, will also begin with some sort of check-in. To come up with the content of the following sessions, we reviewed the current training documents. Though some of the information was still relevant, a lot of it had to be updated. We paid special attention to the paperwork exceptions of the training materials.

Before the first day of training, I also reviewed each of the advisors' applications and resumes. While the current peer advising team was part of the interview process, I was not able to participate due to a prior engagement, so the review of documents helped me get to know each of the members before I met them in person.

Cycle One

Action. The three-day training was scheduled for the week prior to the beginning of Fall Semester 2018. As planned the first day of training focused on community and team building.

The peer advisors will be together for one whole academic year and the success of the program and its events depend on them being able to work together as a team.

The first day happened as follows: I started by introducing myself and my research, though I had introduced myself and my research via email, I had not met the peer advisors in person. I explained why this research was important to me and my connection to the Counseling and Social Change Program. They also felt compelled to share how the program had impacted their lives. Then we did a name plate activity in which the peer advisors were asked to write their name and decorate in a way that represented who they are. The advisors had the opportunity to share to the level they comfortable with the whole group. The second activity was designed to dig a little deeper into our personal stories; the peer advisors were asked to pick a number which was liked to a question and without knowing what the question was they were asked to pick who would answer it. The questions ranged in depth and the advisors had the option to decline to answer and choose another number to get a different question. The third activity was to encourage the team to start thinking about group dynamics and to reflect on the roles they play while working on a team. The peer advisors were asked to complete an arts and crafts activity as a team, however, they had to complete the task while acting out certain roles such as the procrastinator, the one that takes over, the one that does not follow through etc. We concluded the first day of training going over the specialized roles and the advisors were asked to think about the top two roles they were most passionate about.

The following two days focused on learning the peer advisor role and expectations. The peer advisors were introduced to the constitution as well as all the forms that are required to successfully enroll students in the counseling and social change program. Peer advisors practiced filling out these forms and some were asked to participate in an advising session role play with

either Dr. Khan or myself while the others observed. During these two days, the peer advisors learned all the ins and outs of the registration process and special attention was placed on the registration exceptions since there are several instances in which some rules apply and other times where they do not. For example, students from the interdisciplinary major have an entirely different registration process. By the end of the third day the peer advisors were given their advising schedule, their specialized role, and were ready to begin holding office hours by the first week of fall semester 2018.

    Reflect. The team and I consistently debriefed after each activity and training day, and a survey asked them to rate the overall effectiveness of the training was sent out at the end of the third day to all of the peer advisors. During the training, the whole team was engaged in all the activities. They asked questions along the way and we continued checking in throughout the process. Overall, they were really excited to be a part of the peer advising team and to begin holding office hours. In in the survey, all of the peer advisors articulated feeling either confident or very confident in their ability to hold office hours after the three days of training. The survey also identified any gaps in the training and asked the peer advisors to identify an area that they would like to review further. Current peer advisors expressed feeling most concerned about the many exemptions and worried about the first time they will help a student that required an exemption. This concern was captured in the following student's response: "I would like to go over the small caveats, rate instances and tricky rules. I want to make sure I know all the little details before at the back of my hand before I start seeing students." Finally, the peer advisors agreed that they enjoyed the three bonding activities the most one student expressed, "yes! I absolutely loved the bonding and critical aspect of it", talking specifically about the group dynamics activity. A second peer advisor also wrote "it was very helpful to watch

returning/graduate peer advisor and Dr. Khan model a session with a student." The student was referring to the role-playing component of the training, however the comment directly related to the need of face-to-face interaction between the peer advisors and the formal leadership. I purposefully chose to schedule all bonding activities before the formal training as a way to help the students genuinely connect with one another and with both Dr. Kahn and I, without the pressure of the responsibilities that were about to come. Additionally, I believe that working on this kind of relationship building first will increase the team's effectiveness by deepening their commitment to each other.

Plan. Overall, the survey reflected a successful training and a need for continued guidance around the paperwork exceptions. We decided to use the time during our first Monday meeting to review the main points of the training focusing on the exceptions. That Monday meeting was the perfect time to do this because the first office hours of the semester were scheduled to start that Tuesday. In an effort to support the peer advisors throughout the week, we used Google forms to develop a peer advisor check-in form: this form was to be filled out at the end of their office hours. The Google form asked about the number of students helped during their office hours and about any questions that came up during their session that they would like to discuss as team during our Monday meetings. These advisor check-ins facilitated our mentoring relationship and helped structure our team meetings. This check-in also allowed me to identify the parts of the peer advisor training that need further development.

The two major themes that emerged during this cycle: peer advisors feeling confident about holding office hours and peer advisors wanting more contact during the week, informed the second cycle of this research. These two themes helped shape the agenda for the one-one advising sessions that happened in the middle of the semester.

Cycle Two

  Action. Counseling and Social Change peer advisors hold office hours once a week for three hours. For this cycle I visited each of the peer advisors during their office hours to provide one on one support and bond with them. I used this time to observe how peer advisors interact with other students, to connect with them individually, to offer one on one coaching and, to get feedback on how I can better assist them in their role. I wanted this cycle to be student driven and hear from them and their concerns, and for that reason I only had two guiding questions: how connected do you feel to the team (I assessed connection to the team in terms of friendship, vulnerability and the support they felt from each other) and how do you think you are doing in your role as a peer advisor then I allowed the conversation to flow organically. This cycle was strategically scheduled for the middle of the semester to provide extra support for the students during midterms. I spent one and a half hours out of the three hours with each of them over the course of a week. During this time, I took detailed notes of our conversations and observations I made. I reflected about the data I collected over the weekend and discussed my findings with the team during our Monday meeting where they had the opportunity to share their opinion as well.

  Reflect. I came into this cycle a little biased. I had journaled the previous week about being happy with the team's performance thus far regarding all the administrative tasks however, I was worried that the strong emphasis on work ethic and efficacy this action research was built on had deterred the community and strong friendships that emerged in the years prior. This being the reason why one of the two guiding questions in this cycle was about their feelings of connection to the team and the second one about how they were feeling about their ability to perform their role. In regard to role performance all the peer advisors felt confident about their performance thus far and know that they can reach out for help should they need it. One student

shared that she has not encountered any situation which she did not have the knowledge to handle and that if she were ever in a situation like that, she knows she can send a message to the team via Groupme (the group messaging app the peer advisors use to communicate) someone will reply promptly; she said "everyone has each other's backs and replies promptly." Another peer advisor also mentioned how she has referenced the training materials when she has an advising question, she said, "every time I've had a question, I go back to the binder and the answer is there every time." Results were a lot less concrete however, when discussing their feelings of connection to the team. Peer advisors did not report feeling personally connected to the entire team, but they did report feeling connected to specific members of the team. Additionally, this connection was facilitated by spending time with other peer advisors during each other's office hours and or outside of their peer advisor role during classes they are taking together or running into each other around campus. One peer advisor spoke to the impact of retuning peer advisors to the team dynamic, especially during Monday meetings; she said, I do not feel like I can share something personal during our check ins, but then I hear you and the others (referring to the two other returning advisors) share more personal stuff and I feel like I can too. You bring a sense of community." A third peer advisor expressed feeling connected to the team through the work, "we all share the same passion for the program" she said. Peer advisors also reported wanting to know each other's personal lives more, they "wonder what are they like on a Tuesday." This suggest that while the structure provided during the Monday meetings does not allow for vulnerability and personal relationship building like it did in the past, these bonds and connections are still happening through other interactions and though the shared passion they all feel for the program. An interesting observation made was that the peer advisors had no interest in discussing their role or their connection to the team as much as they

were interested in getting know and connecting with me. The conversation the two guided

questions yielded was minimal and the majority of the time, the peer advisors choose to talk

about what was going on in their personal lives and their personal journeys an they were very

interested on mine as well. This tells me that peer advisors are still needing to connect more, not

only to each other but to myself as well.   Overall, I experienced the peer advisors' feeling secure

in their ability to perform their role and feeling connected to the rest of the team while at the

same time wanting more opportunity to connect both between themselves and with Dr. Kahn and

myself.

Plan. If specific concerns arose during this cycle regarding role performance or team

dynamics an additional cycle was going to be added to address these issues. However, this was

necessary since the peer advisors did not reported any latent issues. This study will remain at

three cycles.

Cycle Three

Action. During this cycle, a focus group and group reflection (see Appendix B for mind

map activity) took place close to the end of fall semester 2018. We dedicated one of our Monday

meetings to debrief and reflect both individually and as a team about the concluding semester. In

a mind map activity see appendix B, I collected our collective thoughts to the following

questions: what did you learn about yourself?; what did you learn about the team?; what are your

goals for yourself next semester?; what are your goals for the team next semester?; and, what

inspired you this semester to come and be present as a peer advisor?. Two additional questions

were added to allow them to reflect on my leadership and provide feedback: (1) what did you

like/ enjoy about my mentorship/advising style?; (2) what can I do better as a mentor/ advisor?

These questions allowed us to reflect our learned experiences. We reflected on these questions individually and then we came as a group to debrief and find themes.

      Reflect. First, we reflected on why serve as peer advisor to begin with? What inspired to show up every week to the meeting, our office hours, and to the events? Unanimously, we all mentioned our love and passion for the program, for the students and for each other. One student wrote: "my love for this minor [program] and team keep me going. I love connecting with everyone." Another student wrote: "the minor [program] it is great, and all students should know about, and I love helping others." As an advisor and mentor, this to me speaks to the importance of engaging our students' passions and helping them develop their why so they can show up to their roles certain and full of conviction. Our whys inspire us and keep us going. Next, we reflected on our individual and collective learning as well as our personal and collective goals for the following semester (Spring 2019). Interestingly, the goals each member had for the team and for the themselves were very similar and resembled what they wrote about for their learning as well. As a goal for the team a peer advisor wrote: "to have more personal time" (referring to personal time with each other) and "hang out outside of meetings." This comment mirrored another peer advisor's response to their personal goal –"to spend more time with other advisors" and a third advisor's comment about what they learned about themselves –I learned to push myself into being a part of a community that checks in and cares about each other." This suggests that connection and relationship building are crucial to developing a successful team. Feelings of connectedness and relationship building also have a huge impact on how each peer advisor learned about working on a team. The peer advisors learned that being part of a team can be inspiring, it made them stronger, more determined, and it leads to personal and professional growth. This can be concluded through comments such as: "I learned that we are supportive of

each other not only professionally but personally;" "something I gained form the team was inspiration to be more productive," and the team is strong and supportive and willing to get the job done and have fun." During this reflection focus group, the team also reflected on the tools that helped them succeed in their role. They identified the constitution as being the foundation of the peer advisor role. One student mentioned, "it [the constitution] just has everything, I know what a peer advisor is because it is clearly written in there." This corroborated once more that structure and clear expectations are important foundations from which the team builds upon. The peer advisors also mentioned how impactful the group dynamics was in regard to binging awareness into their behavior when working in groups. Which speaks to the importance of doing identity and self-reflection activities as a group to foster a positive group dynamic.
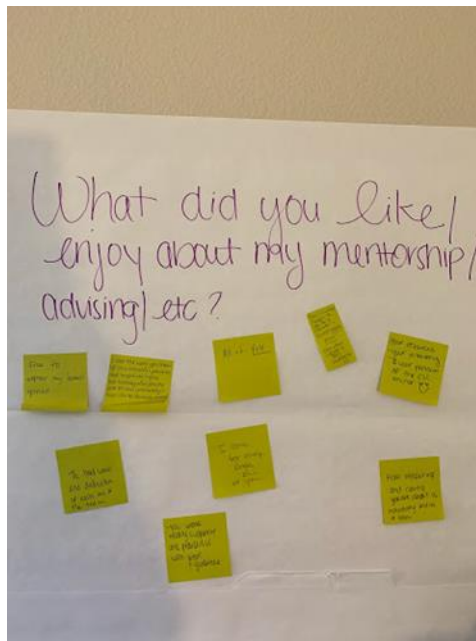
Figure 2. Picture of Peer Advisor Reflection. This picture illustrates the collective reflection of the peer advising team on what they enjoyed about my leadership style.

Another important component of this cycle was for me and the team to reflect on my mentorship and leadership and advising style, and the feedback in this part of the cycle was very

clear. What peer advisors enjoyed the most about me was my passion, love and care which made them feel supported, guided, able to be themselves. *Figure 2* shows the team's reflection on my leadership, multiple peer advisors spoke specifically about my love and passion, one student wrote they loved "how reassuring and caring [I was] about [them] individually and as a team," and a second one wrote that my resources, my mentorship and my passion for the program was what they enjoy the most. Similarly, peer advisors said I could be better at spending more time with them, visit them in their office hours more often and to continue to reflect with them. I realized that by checking in with the each of the peer advisors and visiting them in their office hours I not only worked on my relationship with them, but it also had an impact on their professional development. When they were asked to reflect on what I could do better peer advisors wrote: "more check-ins, it was reassuring that I was doing what I'm supposed to after we talked" and, "visit us more, it was really helpful reflecting on our work." Overall, this collective reflection validates a major theme that emerged from the beginning during the pre-cycle which is the need our students have for community and relationship building and, one-one student advising and mentoring even when advising groups. The purpose of this action research was team development and to analyze my own leadership development, for this reason it was important to me to end this research with a collective reflection. The team enjoyed being a part of the process they were very engaged and were excited to make connections though they were a little hesitant to give feedback about my leadership style.

Plan. This last cycle brought to fruition this action research. Our reflection revisited all of the of the cycles and important events of the semester, I will use all these data and the themes we found as a group to develop the major findings of the research.

Findings

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I choose this action research because I wanted to fix something: I wanted to fix the peer advising team at San Diego State. I wanted an efficient team. A team that worked like a well-oiled social justice fighting machine that never cave, atop of that I wanted this machine to be happy, to build community and to change its own parts. Additionally, to be completely honest, I wanted to be recognized as a great advisor and mentor who had the ability to inspire its advisees to be the very best they could be. Work ethic, my most salient value drove this action research. I decided to use the BART system, a four-element group analysis system used in the Tavistock conferences, to restructure the peer advisor training making it the foundation of this research (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). However, feminist's leadership theory also heavily informed my practice. BART's four elements are boundaries, authority, role and task, and the findings of this research will be organized according to these four categories and in their relation to feminist leadership, specifically the type of feminist leadership described by Batliwala (2011) and Bell Hooks (2015).

Boundaries

Boundaries are the container for the group. They are mainly related to related to task, time and territory but they can also apply to resources, roles and responsibilities. Boundaries can be as rigid or as flexible as the group and the task needs them to be and they shift in relation to authority. Additionally, boundaries need to be clearly stated, agreed upon and adhered to in order to serve as the container for group work (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). In this research, time, territory, and task boundaries were delineated before the beginning of the semester during the peer advisor training. All training documents and specifically the Counseling and Social Change Program Constitution were used to stablish such boundaries, specifically, those related to time, territory and task. Article IV of the constitution clearly states time boundary, as it describes the

time commitments that this role requires. Article V, which describes the individual peer advisor roles sets the territory boundary. Finally, articles I,II, and III which describe the overall Counseling and Social Change program vision, the director's vision for the peer advising team, the peer advisor mission statement, and the peer advisor's objectives set up the parameters of the task boundary (task boundaries will be discussed with the overall task later in the findings). Overall the peer advisors responded well to the boundaries established. The survey as the end of the training lists the constitution and the step by step training materials to be the most helpful part of the training. Additionally, as mentioned before, peer advisors made references to their helpfulness throughout the study.

Time Boundaries. Article IV of the constitution established that the peer advisors were required to attend a weekly Monday meeting from 10 am to 11 am, and peer advisors were required to hold 3 continuous hours of office hours. Additionally, this article limited the number of times a peer advisor could cancel office hours or ask for coverage and how it should be done, and it specified a timeframe in which the peer advisors were to respond to emails and other forms of communication. With the exception of three peer advisors this the time boundary was respected. Since canceling office hours was one of the main concerns that framed this research, and for me this needed to be a strict boundary. I associated being physically present in meetings in office hours and in other program events as a sign of not only the work getting done but also of the advisor's level of commitment and care for the task. However, this was not the case among the peer advisor team at SDSU. Time boundaries were both respected and challenged throughout the semester by two of the peer advisors most dedicated to their task. One of these peer advisors was always present and on time not only to the Monday meeting and office hours but to all of the outreach and social events while the other one was the peer advisor that was

absent to the Monday meetings and to office hours the most; exceeding the amount of times allowed by the constitution. Both of these peer advisors went above and beyond in the performance of their roles and demonstrated a great dedication for the overall task of the group suggesting that time boundaries should be flexible, and exceptions should be made in a case by case basis.

Territory Boundaries. Territory boundaries not necessarily refer only to physical space, but it also means the metaphoric territory, the space where one groups member's responsibilities end and another one begins (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). In this research both physical and metaphoric territory boundaries were clearly stated from the beginning during the training and in the constitution. In this research, the obvious physical territory boundaries where the peer advising office and the meeting space and physical territory boundaries were strongly maintained to the degree that peer advisors sat in the same spot during Monday meetings and apologized and moved if they took someone else's spot. Additionally, peer advisors had to negotiate time and territory boundaries merged together as one advising shift ended and another one started and when a peer advisor stopped by the office outside of their advising hours. This type of boundary bending was done successfully especially by two peer advisors whose shift overlapped for an hour. They became the dynamic duo of the registration process and worked together to finalize the registration process of hundreds of students. More so, metaphorical territory boundaries were outlined in Article V of the constitution as the individual peer advisor roles. Each advisor was responsible for leading their own specialized role in support of the group task; however, each individual task required the whole team to participate to get it done. All of the specialized roles were created to meet the need of a project required by the group task. I created these roles because in the past some peer advisors took on more than others causing harm to the team. In

other words, boundaries were nonexistent before. Establishing territorial boundaries have been instrumental to the success of these year's peer advising team. During our reflective cycle, one team member spoke directly to the role the structure created by these boundaries had on the team, they wrote– "structure made a difference in the performance of the team." Additionally, in my final debrief with Dr. Kahn, she attributed the specialized roles to the effectiveness of the team as each of them had a specific task to fulfill within their roles as peer advisors.

Authority

Ronald Heifetz (2009) defines authority as the power given to someone to perform a service, and when a person takes up authority it is assumed that they are knowledgeable and responsible for the task. Acknowledging, questioning, taking up, and delegating authority was central to this research since it is grounded in feminist theory (Batliwala, 2011). While Dr. Kahn deferred her authority to me by introducing me as a person who had been a part of the program for years and by validating the importance of my research, it was important to me that I was not seen as the sole authority. From the beginning I stated that everyone in the group was as much a researcher as I was and that their conclusions were as valid if not more valid than mine, this is even stated in the constitution in Article I under the *Directors Vision for the Peer Advisors*. By creating induvial roles, it was intended that each peer advisor would have the opportunity to lead us in a part of the task. For example, the classroom outreach coordinator is responsible for updating the classroom spreadsheet, preparing presentation materials, and keeping us accountable to our goal of presentations per week, however, the classroom outreach coordinator is not responsible for completing all the presentations alone. Throughout the semester Dr. Kahn and I successfully encouraged the peer advisors engage in the decision-making process and prioritized any suggestion and input they had. Additionally, we allowed them to fulfil their

specialized role as they saw fit; this was done with the purpose of challenging them to recognize within themselves their authority and power to influence both the team and the program. Evidence of these came across strongly during the mind map activity in Cycle 3. When the P.A's were asked to reflect on their goals for the following semester all of them talked about their plans to improve both the CSC program and themselves as peer advisors. One student specifically talked about wanting to design an outreach plan, the student wrote: "come up with a plan to be able to outreach in community colleges" as her main goal for Spring semester. This shows that the student felt they had the power to perform their role however they saw fit and that they could design new ways of fulfilling their responsibilities.

Collaboration and consensus were a theme for the semester. I found, that learning to delegate authority is crucial in group work that is centered in social justice, especially if the work is taken up through a feminist lens. This is because not all of the team members are able to operate at 100% of their capacity all the time, we are human, but if the team is centered in feminist theory it will readjust and shift authority accordingly. This was definitely present in our team dynamic, a perfect example of this happened towards the beginning of the semester after all of the advising schedules and office hours had been finalized and posted on our website, social media accounts and posted throughout the campus. One of the advisors suffered a miscarriage and was unable to hold her office ours for three weeks, though at the beginning it was supposed to be just one. First, as a team we discussed if we wanted to cancel her office hours for what we thought was going to be one week, and the consensus was that we should try to cover those hours. From then on, every Monday during these three weeks the peer advisors will discuss amongst them who could or could not cover those times. The peer advisors were also assured that they did not have to commit to covering those hours if they did not want to. Those three

weeks, the advisor's office hours were always covered, sometimes by one peer advisor, sometimes two or three peer advisors would divide those hours according to their schedules, and even Dr. Kahn covered a shift. In addition to her shifts being covered, her responsibilities as the *Community College Outreach Coordinator* were being delegated amongst all of us. Though the severity of the situation might of encourage the team to be more inclined to collaborate, the way in which this was handled allowed for the each of us to take ownership of our authority to influence the group and decide how we wanted to handle the situation on a weekly basis.

Role

Roles are the actions and reactions we perform in different situations. The roles we play can be momentary or they can last a life time; they can be achieved, acquired, assigned or ascribed; roles can be formal or informal; and they can be a reflection of our identity, this called valence (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). Article V of constitution outlines specific peer advisor roles; roles such as *secretary and social media coordinator, campus outreach coordinator and community college outreach coordinator*. Having an individual role within the group did help the team become more effective, however it was not because tasks were getting done but because each member felt they had a purpose and that their presence mattered. Often during Monday meetings peer advisors shared how they made an extra effort to show up to the meeting because they had an important update to share the semester. Also, those advisors who were unable to attend a meeting checked in via zoom meeting or video call. The extra efforts made were always in relation to their individual roles as peer advisors.

Additionally, I would like to consider the many roles peer advisors had to navigate within their peer advisor roles. In the student affairs field, we often remind our student leaders that they are students first, however, they are often more than students and more than leaders. In actuality,

students are whatever drives them to be a student and whatever drives them to be a leader. Students come into leadership positions and into group work already playing many roles and those multiple roles inform each other. This was present throughout the study; however, it was prevalent in cycle 2 during our 1:1 session when all of the peer advisors talked about who they are in their personal lives and were not interested in talking about their peer advisor role. This suggests that as the formal leadership, Dr. Kahn and I were neglecting to incorporate their other roles into our space. Neglecting to understand each of the roles our students bring into our spaces is at minimum irresponsible of our part, especially as student affairs professionals who are said to be all about social justice. The Counseling and Social Change program is one said program and the peer advising cohort did experience this type of wholistic inclusion of their many roles throughout this research as mentioned in Cycle 2 peer advisors did feel like they could share more personally in the meeting even when they did not do it all the time, and in Cycle 3 when giving me feedback about my leadership they reported feeling supported. Students experienced an environment where they were encouraged to share about their life outside of not only the CSC program but also outside of SDSU as whole. The peer advisors shared their accomplishments outside of the program during our Monday meetings, one of them shared his excitement about his upcoming sky diving plans and we took a moment to share his excitement and nervousness. We all cheered the Monday after he dived and rejoiced when he proudly showed us the pictures. More importantly, whenever a peer advisor shared something eventful in their lives, we always took the time to debrief on the significance of the event and meaning it had in their life. This allowed them to incorporate and explore their skills outside of their particular role as a peer advisor and connect them back to all of the roles they held.

Task

The task of a group is perhaps the most important component of group work. It gives the group a reason to exist. The peer advising group has many tasks during the academic semester, however its primary task is outlined in articles I and II of the constitution. These two articles describe the overall CSC program vision, the program's director vision for the peer advisors and the peer advisor's mission statement. In short, these two articles state that the primary task of the peer advisors is to support the program's mission of facilitating individual, group, and systems change in diverse social contexts by fostering an environment in which students feel empowered, supported and welcomed. Peer advisors support this mission by hosting office hours, outreach events, co-hosting the Social Justice Symposium and the hosting the CSC graduation, which are additional tasks that support the primary task. Green and Molenkamp (2005) suggest that regardless of the primary task, groups also have a survival task. The survival task is often unstated, and the group unconsciously acts on it and creates conflict, and it can sometimes work with the primary task. It seems like the survival task of the peer advisor group is to connect to each other and to the formal leadership. This theme was not only present in past peer advising cohorts as suggested by the survey, but it was also present in every cycle of this study. This suggests that in order for a group to survive and complete its main task, members of the group need to feel connected both to each other and to the formal leadership.

BART Conclusion

By the end of my research I had hoped that my understanding of group development as well as my capacity to lead a group of student leaders had improved. But most importantly and it all honestly, I wanted a team that worked as hard as I did for our students and so I designed this action research strongly on the premise of work ethic. Each of my cycles were designed for me to reflect on my ability to accomplish this, and success was to be measured based on the data of

each cycle showing the peer advisors feeling prepared, supported, and part of team, see Figure 2. Another major outcome of this study I was aiming for was an improvement on administrative tasks efficacy. The marker of success was if through my cycles, I was able to disrupt the mid-semester crash I had been witnessing the past two years. It was especially important for me to know that I did the best job I could to train and mentor this cohort peer advisors, and that by leading by example, I have inspired them to have a strong work ethic; to treat each student they serve with compassion, to make them feel welcomed and to empower them.

I had hoped the group analysis system BART would help me do this and in many ways it did. BART was instrumental in the restructuring of the training and in providing the team with the clarity and structure it so desperately needed. Figure 2 shows a dramatic increase in the success of the peer advisor training. Though the second column suggests a decrease in *successful* responses from current peer advisors this decrease is nulled by the gigantic shift in *very successful* responses from previous peer advisors compared to the current peer advising cohort shown in column 1. The success of the re-structured training is further supported by the fact that the new training was one hundred percent successful (when adding the "*very successful*" and *"successful"* columns together) in teaching the peer advisors everything they needed to know to perform their role. Figure 2 also shows that while previous PA's found some parts of the training somewhat successful and even not successful at all, none of the current PA's felt this way at all. Additional markers of this team's success are their incredible accomplishments during the 2018-2019 academic year. This academic year the team was able to outreach to more people than ever before: our team began establishing relationships with Transfer and EOP (Especial Opportunity Programs) Centers in four local community colleges and establishing partnerships with key student affairs departments on campus, presented in forty different lower division classes across

eight different academic departments, held nine tabling events at strategic times during the semester, and hosted the our biggest social justice symposium yet with international speakers and over 200 people in attendance. However, BART alone did not yield this amazing team.
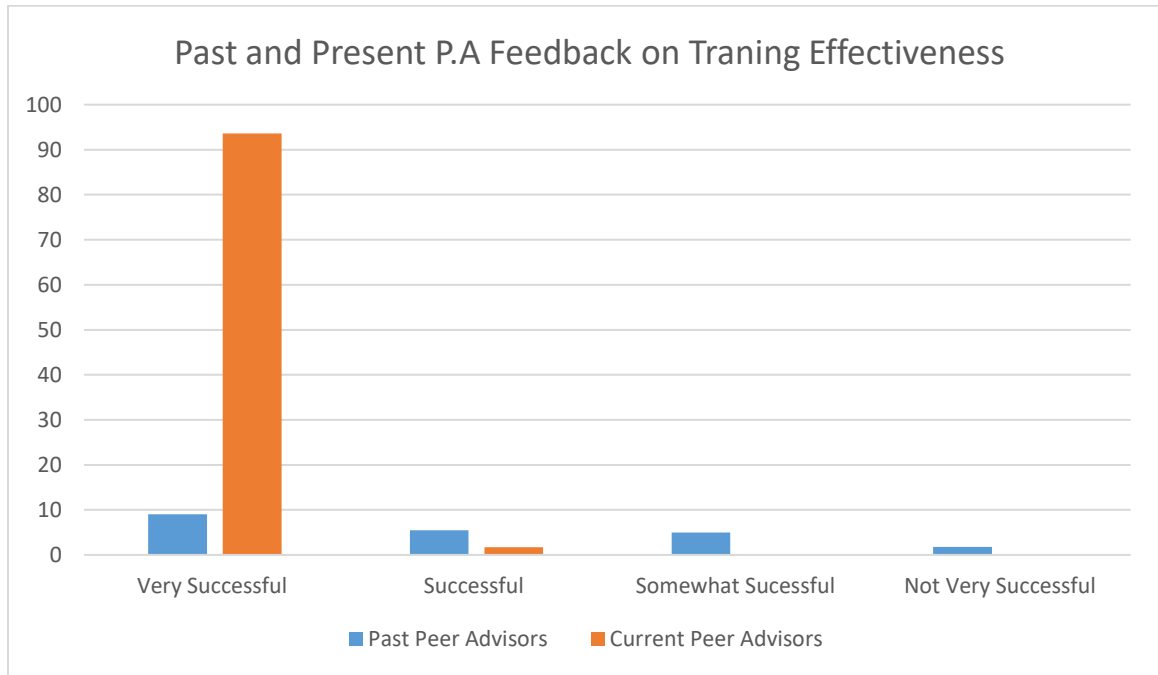
Figure 3. Past and Present P.A Feedback on Training Effectiveness. This figure shows the average response of *very successful, successful, somewhat successful and not very successful* by past and current peer advisors when describing the success of the peer advisor training.

I was working as the Graduate Assistant to the Women's Commons (WC) at the University of San Diego (USD) at the same time I was conducting this research where I also advised a group of students and my task was in many ways similar to my task at San Diego State. Naturally, the Women's Commons at USD is centered in Feminist theory, more specifically in Black Feminist Thought, which provides a completely different way to operate and lead. The WC at USD works from two very important theoretical foundations, the first being Bell Hooks'

(2015) definition of feminism: "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. xii). The second theoretical framework being Batliwala's feminist leadership for social transformation (2011). In this reading, Batliwala invites us to discuss and think of power in a different way and suggests that only when we accept, understand and acknowledge personal and structural power dynamics we can achieve transformational change. During my time as a graduate assistant I learned to lead through this feminist lens which has been instrumental in my development as a student affair's professional and it certainly played an important role in my work at SDSU.

      BART + Feminist Leadership. BART is without a doubt an amazing group analysis tool and it is particularly useful when used as the framework to build effective trainings on. However, BART is just that, a framework and an analysis tool, it is not a leadership practice. I found that had I just used BART to restructure the training, the team would have not developed the way it did, and it is mainly because of collaboration. From the beginning I understood action research to be collective reflection, planning and action and while I did see myself as a researcher, I saw myself as a regular member of team just as much. Also, at the same time I was beginning to think about my pre-cycle I was starting my position at USD's WC and Batliwala's (2011) explanation of the *deep structure of organizations* was fresh in my mind. The *deep structure of organizations* as Batliwala describes it is the elephant in the room that nobody names, the unacknowledged power dynamics, the culture, the way people work, and my other hidden processes that have a huge impact on how the organization, or in this case, how the peer advisors function. She also identifies *practice* as being the largest domain of leadership; she argues that "the most transformative leadership is about doing and enabling [in a different way]" (pg. 53).

Inspired by Hooks and Batliwala I began my pre-cycle by including previous peer advisors and the director of the minor. I knew what I wanted out of my research and I was determined to do things differently. Everything in this research and everything the team was able to accomplish this academic year was co-created, and power and authority was always discussed. An invitation to challenge us (the director of the minor and me) was made in every single meeting. No decision was made without the consent of the team. It was this shift in power that is where the success of the team came from. Feminist leadership allowed the team to confront their own power and authority and adjust it based on the needs of the individual peer advisor and the needs of the team. The clearest example of this happened near the end of the semester when one of the advisors decided to step down. She had been struggling with money and decided to pick up extra hours at work and was unable to keep holding office hours but wanted to continue to support the team in other ways. She came to us for guidance, and as a team we found that it was empowering to see her put her needs first and we adjusted the boundaries of the peer advisor role to meet her needs. This would not have happened if feminist leadership was not being used.

Limitations

Centering this research paper on team development and more specifically on efficiency along was a difficult task, and though this research provided amazing insight into team and leadership development there are many limitations to consider and further analysis that could be done with the data of this research alone. These topics include context, personal connection to the CSC program, looking inward and questioning formal authority more, and an abundance of data.

Yes, the changes made to the structure of the peer advisor team using BART and Feminist leadership theory did have a huge impact on team efficiency. However, these changes

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were welcomed by the director of the minor and accepted as the way things are by the incoming peer advising cohort. I am confident about the impact that using BART and Feminist leadership combined has on team development, and I also believe that implementing these changes in an environment that is not already operating from a social justice perspective and unofficially, even from a feminist lens would be a lot harder to do. The director of the program gave me full domain over the training and the peer advisors came into their role from this new perspective. For this reason, I wonder had I done this research at a different setting or even in a different semester (in the spring for example, after the team had operated together for a whole semester), if the team would have been as successful.

The second limitation I want to discuss is personal connection to the program. Every peer advisor in the team speaks to the incredible influence the program has had in their lives. This personal connection to the program is often shared when speaking about the reason behind their commitment to the peer advisor role, which begs the question--how would this research look like with a group of people that does not share the same passion about the mission of the program?

Another major limitation of my practice rather than my research is that I was constantly reflecting on the team's efficacy rather than Dr. Kahn's and my efficacy in the developing the team. I addressed the team a few times when they forgot to submit a form or when something was left undone. However, I never addressed the director of the minor for things she was not doing or publicly addressed with the team things that I was failing to do. I placed the bulk of the responsibility to perform solely on the team was there was so much that I could be doing to develop Dr. Kahn and I as the formal leadership of the team. Questioning this type of power dynamic is especially important when operating from a feminist leadership lens because failing to do so means we are simply recreating existing systems rather than creating change.

Finally, I would like to address the abundance of data this research yielded. With the existing data, findings could be focused solely on the following categories: efficient training and professional skill development for student volunteers, on outreach techniques and initiatives, on student's individual leadership development in group settings, and on programing and social justice education. I have spent three whole academic years with the CSC program, and this gives me access to prior data, experiences and knowledge that influenced how I made sense of this research. For this reason, a better analysis could and can still be made of the success of the individual implementations of the training. My pre-cycle and cycle one alone could give me enough data to explore ways to design trainings that are engaging, impactful and successful in creating a strong foundation for teamwork in social justice contexts; and how those individual implementations helped develop our student's professional skills while they are volunteering at our departments. Outreach techniques and initiatives is another important topic that could be further developed with the data from this research. All the individual peer advisor roles had in a way as their task to increase not only the program's visibility on campus and in the community but the department in which it is housed. Lastly, further analysis could be made on programing and social justice education. The services the peer advisors provide go further than academic and program advising. The peer advisors engage in conversations around power and oppression, systems and individual change, and creating new social and personal narratives. It is imperative that we center these conversations in social justice work.

Recommendations

As member of the Counseling and Social Change program we are constantly working towards creating a more equitable world one person at a time. The CSC program is social justice, and the peer advisors have a huge role in ensuring the continuation of the program and are a

tremendous help for the director. For this reason, having an efficient peer advisor team should become the priority for the director. In order to facilitate a good team dynamic that fosters efficiency I recommend the leadership to: (1) limit the size of the cohort, (2) have at least one returning peer advisor in the team, (3) have clear expectations, (4) be more intentional about incorporating dialogue into meetings, (5) be more intentional about getting to know the students personally, and (6) hold yourself accountable.

1. This year we selected only five peer advisors to be a part of the team whereas in the past this number has been larger, and last academic year's cohort being the largest with eight new peer advisors. I find this to be important because these leadership positions have to be beneficial to both the program and the students. This means that the advisor needs be aware of their ability to provide not only training but mothership to every student in the cohort. Also, with a smaller group tasks will be more easily distributed and easier to follow up on. The number of students in this year's cohort was ideal and it maximized efficiency because there was a specialized role for each advisor: each advisor had their own identity within the group.

2. In addition to having a smaller incoming peer advisor cohort. Having a returning peer advisor to help train and mentor the new peer advisor was a huge help to the director of the program this academic year. In addition to me restructuring the training, the CSC peer advisor cohort had three returning advisors. These took the whole peer advisor team to a total of nine. However, the returning peer advisors maintained more of a mentorship and supporting role and only the five incoming peer advisors hosted office hours and had specialized roles. The returning

advisors were present in weekly meetings and stepped in when needed and played a role especially in the big events hosted by the program.

3. Having clear expectations was a primary theme during my pre-cycle and my last cycle. During the pre-cycle there was a unanimous need for clarification from the previous peer advisors, which prompted the restructuring of the training and especially the program's constitution. During the reflection focus group, the constitution was identified as the document that was most helpful to their role. This leads me to conclude that having clear expectations from the beginning and having a document to refer back is a key component of a successful group dynamic.

4. The major theme in this research was without a doubt being present. Both past and present peer advisors expressed an incredible need and desire for more access to the leadership, which in this case was both the director of the program and me, and to each other. Give that both of us did not attend either of the social events planned by the peer advisors I feel the need to emphasize this recommendation the most. Meaningful mentorships require that a relationship is formed, otherwise it is just training. We need to take it a point to get to know the students we advise outside of their role. Additionally, the social events were built into the peer advisor role with a very specific purpose, and it was to build community and strengthening the group. Dr. Kahn and I need to be present in such event.

5. Lastly, in wanting to develop the most efficient social justice warrior team, I believe I placed all the responsibility to perform on the team and none on the director. In this very important recommendation, I want to invite you to hold

yourself accountable. To hold yourself accountable to be ready for training in advance, to review the training documents, to prioritize making time to get to know the peer advisors personally, to make it to social events, to inspire them, to not place all the weight of the program on them, to develop them, and most importantly to love and trust them.

Implications for Leadership, Team, and Professional Development

This action research was transformative in my formation as a student affair professional. I learned a lot about the system of higher education, and about myself: my leadership style, who do I want to be, and it most importantly reassured my passion and commitment for the for the field and especially the students. At the beginning of this process, while doing my literature review, I came across Sememinller's 2016 article in which he asserts that students' leadership development in the responsibility of everyone in higher education which is something that I believe wholeheartedly and try to live out as a professional in this field. The purpose of this research was group development; to develop a team that was dedicated, hardworking and efficient, and I did. Though the changes made to the structure of the peer advisor role such as the constitution, the specialized roles, and the training addressed important concerns and made a huge impact on the teams performance, I learned that it is us as advisors, mentors and higher education professionals who have the most influence in our students' development and it is through our relationship with them. As higher education professionals, but especially as advisors and mentors we need to (1) be present, (2) listen, and (3) it is all about how we make them feel.

Be Present.

The major theme that emerged from every cycle was the peer advisors' want for more one on one interaction with either Dr. Kahn or me. This was huge for me to realize because I was

so focused on team performance that I discouraged personal check-ins during the Monday meeting. So, I will challenge myself to be balance performance expectations with relationship building; to get to know my advisees outside of their role and to attend their organization's social events. Scheduling regular one-on-ones with students should be a priority for advisors, as they are important to their personal and professional development.

Listen.

Though I tried my best to check in my ego and knowledge and leave it at the door during our reflections and meetings, I sometimes found myself changing things in my head and making assumptions only to discover that if I stayed quiet and listened, they not only figured it out but they came up with something better and taught me something new in the process. We, as professionals in this field are here for them, to bring out the very best they've got, and we can only do that by listening to their interests, their values and their passions; by listening to who they are.

It is all about how we make them feel.

This is perhaps the most important of the three. While analyzing the survey results after the training I made an interesting observation Out of the five incoming peer advisors three rated the training very successful in all categories and two rated some categories just as successful, however the three advisors who rated the training as very successful answered feeling only somewhat confident to begin holding office hours while the two advisors who rated the training as successful reported feeling very confident in the ability to begin holding office hours. This suggests that a feeling of confidence trumps knowing the material. This to me means that it does not really matter what knowledge or resources I pass on, if I cannot make them feel like they are able to accomplish their goal and change and influence the spaces they walk into then I have

given them nothing. In the words of Maya Angelou, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." I want to make each student I interact with like they are able to persist at least one more day.

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Appendix A: Training Satisfaction Survey

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q2 To what extent was the Peer Advisor Training successful in:

	Very successful (1)	Successful (2)	Somewhat successful (3)	Not very successful (4)
describing the Peer Advisor role (1)	○	○	○	○
clearly explaining the attendance expectation to the weekly advisor meeting (2)	○	○	○	○
clearly explaining the three hour a week commitment to hold office hours (3)	○	○	○	○
clearly explaining what behavior was expected of me while holding office hours (4)	○	○	○	○
teaching me how to properly maintain the email account (5)	○	○	○	○
helping me feel confident in my ability to advise students during	○	○	○	○

my office hours
(6)

teaching me the main points to cover when advising students (7)	○	○	○	○
teaching me how to help students from the Interdisciplinary major (8)	○	○	○	○
teaching me all the steps to properly register students in the Counseling and Social Change program (9)	○	○	○	○
teaching me what a declaration form is (10)	○	○	○	○
teaching me how to properly fill out a declaration form (11)	○	○	○	○
teaching me when to submit the declaration form to the registrar's office (12)	○	○	○	○
teaching me what the RAAR form is (13)	○	○	○	○
teaching me how to properly fill	○	○	○	○

out a RAAR form (14)				
teaching me when a RAAR form needs to be submitted to academic advising (15)	○	○	○	○
teaching me about the student database (16)	○	○	○	○
teaching me how to update the student database (17)	○	○	○	○
teaching me what information belongs in the database (18)	○	○	○	○
clearly explaining the special projects requirement (19)	○	○	○	○
clearly explaining the tabling and outreach expectations (20)	○	○	○	○
clearly explaining the classroom presentations expectations (21)	○	○	○	○
clearly explaining the requirements of my specialized role (22)	○	○	○	○

| in making the training fun and engaging (23) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| in creating space for team members to bond with each other (24) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q8 How confident do you feel about holding office hours on your own, with no additional training?

○ Very confident (1)

○ Somewhat confident (2)

○ Not very confident (3)

Q6 In your opinion, what was most helpful about the Peer Advisor training?
_____

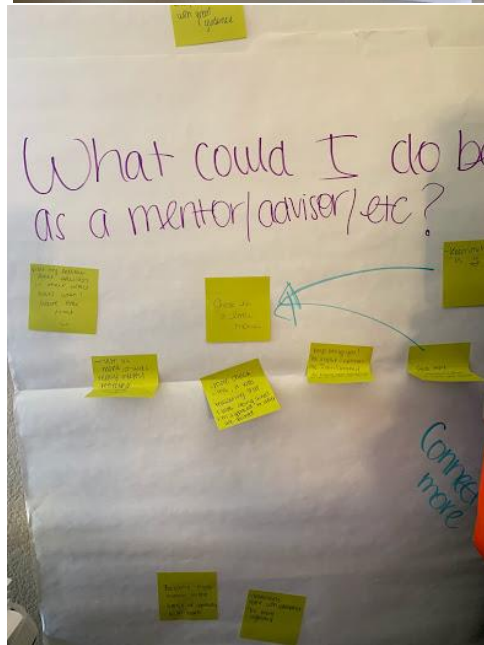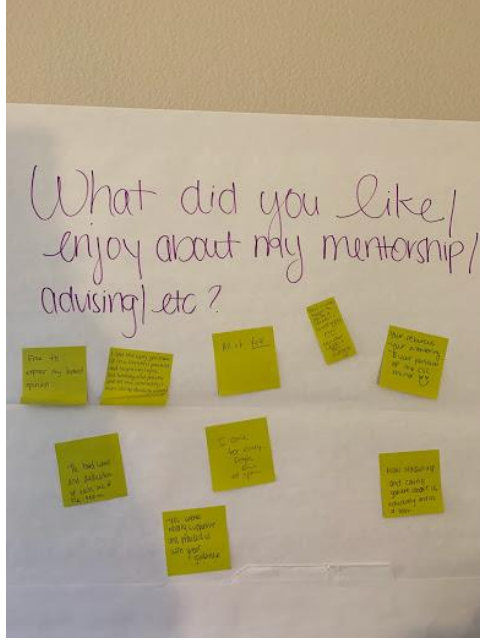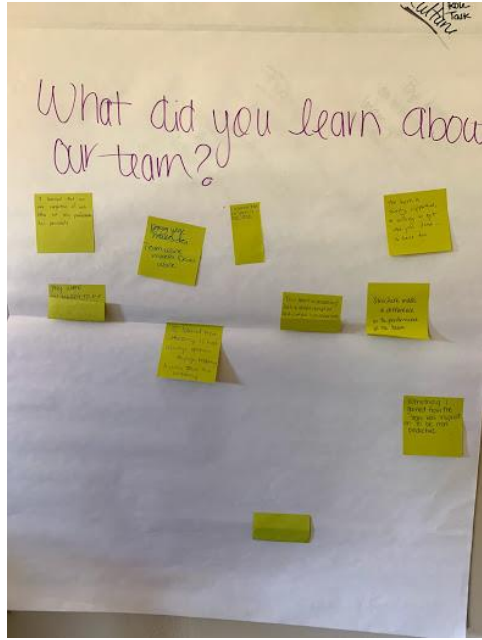Q9 What part of the training would you like to review during our first Peer Advisor meeting?
_____

Q9 What do you think about the team arts and crafts activity? Do you think it was successful in delivering a message?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix B: Reflective Mind Mapping Activity
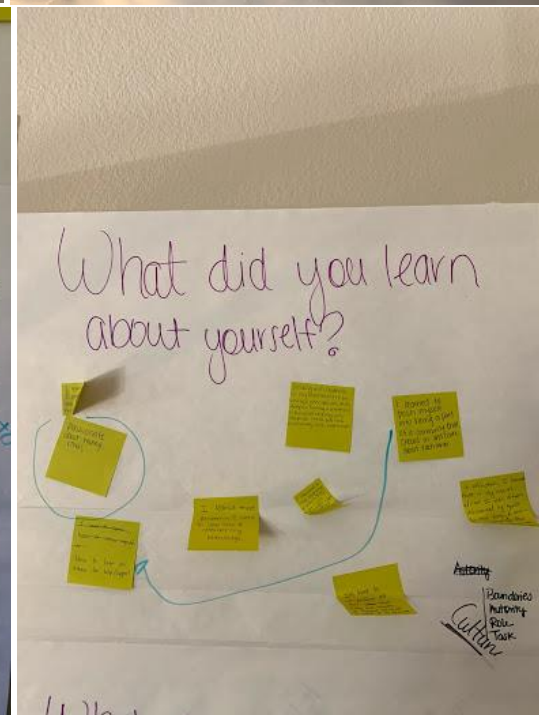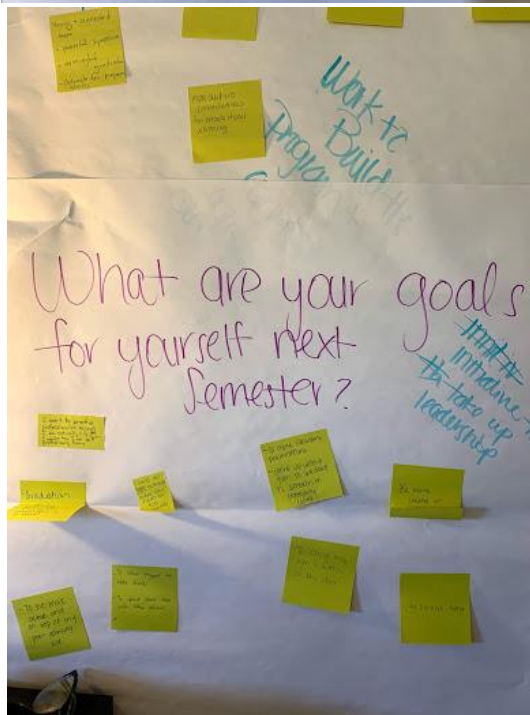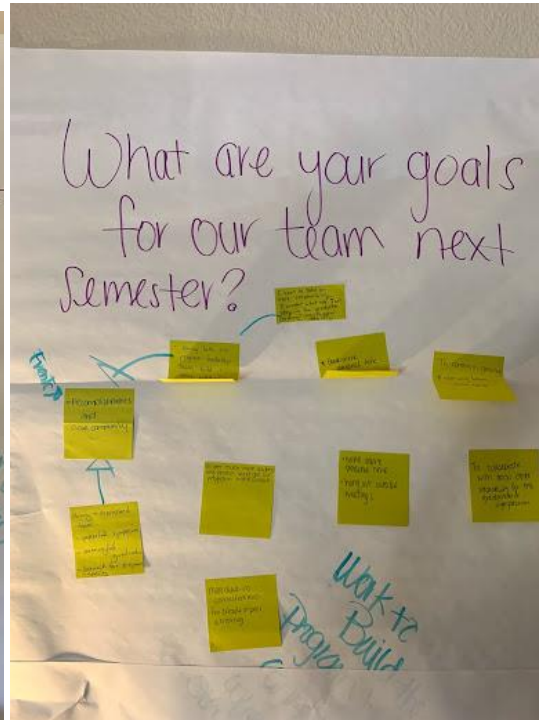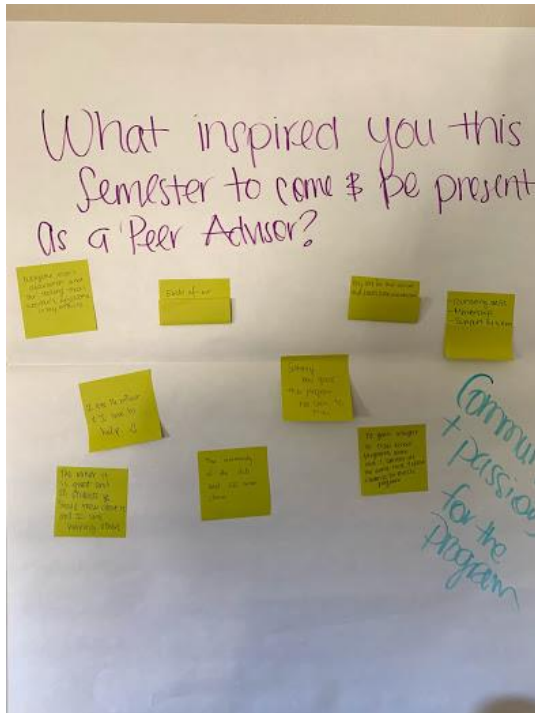
Appendix C: Consent Form

Developing Efficacy Through Team Bonding, Effective Training and Mentorship

You are being asked to take part in a research study about Peer Advising, Mentorship and Leadership. You are being asked to participate because you have been selected to work as a Peer Advisor for the Counseling and Social Change Program during the 2018-19 academic year. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to analyze the ways in which I can help the director of the program prepare CSC Peer Advisors meet the needs of a diverse student population by promoting team efficacy among the Counseling and Social Change Peer Advisors.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a team bonding retreat, a formal peer advisor training, a one on one mentorship session to be scheduled during your regular office hours and a reflection focus group at the end of the semester. Please note, that all the commitments for this study will take place during the time you have already set aside for peer advising and you will not be asked to do anything outside of your normal responsibilities.

Risks and benefits:

There is the risk that you may consider some questions to be sensitive. The benefit of this study is that we will learn from your experiences, which will inform our practice as peer advisors. Please note that there are counseling services available to you on campus. You can visit the Counseling and Psychological Services office is located in the 4th floor of the Calpulli Center or contact them at (619)594-5220.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In anything we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file and only the researcher will have access to them. Any recordings will be saved in a password protected file and will be deleted after transcription.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are allowed to skip any question you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future

relationship with the Counseling and Social Change Program or your position as a peer advisor. If you have agreed to participate, you may withdraw your participation at any time.

If you have questions: Please contact the primary researcher, Delia Contreras at any time if you have questions. You can reach Delia at (619) 721-5884 or dcontreras@sandiego.edu. You can also reach my faculty advisor Dr. Ngo, at maianhngo@sandiego.edu or (858)232-6217.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____Date _____

Your Name (printed)

_____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview recorded either by audio or video.

Your Signature _____Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____

Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____
Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least five years beyond the end of the study.