

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GANDHINAGAR

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Programme

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) programme is an academic support scheme for the undergraduate students launched by IIT Gandhinagar in October 2012. This programme is designed on the philosophy that peer group of students play an extremely influential role in determining their learning behavior. Students are known to actively seek advice from their peer group as they share the same generational perspective. The PAL programme at IIT Gandhinagar initiated with a specific aim to assist those first year students who face difficulties in adapting to English as the medium of instruction in their coursework. These students are identified by counselors during one-on-one interaction sessions that are held with the incoming batch of students during their first month on campus. The senior students who serve as peer educators are selected by a faculty in-charge of the PAL programme by inviting applications and conducting personal interviews in August every year.

In a model PAL session, a senior student (second or a third year) assists two first year students by sharing his/her knowledge and experience that helps them adapt to the new learning environment. The first year students and their peer educators meet for four hours every week for PAL sessions, usually in the evenings. The peer educators are compensated for their service through *Earn While You Learn* (EWYL) scheme at IIT Gandhinagar. The PAL sessions begin in September every year and continue through Sem I and Sem II. During this period, the faculty in-charge meets with peer educators periodically and keeps sharing righteous practices on mentoring and interpersonal communication to enable them address needs of students more effectively.

The platform facilitated by PAL programme not only results in learning outside the classrooms, it also encourages discussions regarding academic and any other concerns in an informal peer environment. By seeking guidance from their peers, the students become more aware of the resources available on campus and experience a gradual transition to the institute's culture. This results in an increased self-confidence among the students, which helps them on several fronts.

It was realized that some students can be further benefited from learning in a peer group, if there are additional sessions dedicated to a specific course in which they can resolve their doubts. In this view, an alternative peer group led activity, named Academic Help Sessions (AHS), was conceptualized and initiated in August 2015. These help sessions are designed to provide a tutorial-like platform to students where they can discuss technical details and problem solving skills (for an identified course) with a small group of peer tutors everyday after dinner (9 pm-11 pm). These

sessions are primarily aimed to help the first and second year students who are facing challenges in specific courses. The instructors of the specific courses are also informed about sessions being run and they are invited to participate and share their feedback. The sessions are coordinated by a faculty in-charge who: (i) identifies the specific course, (ii) selects tutors from the senior students, and (iii) periodically discuss the progress with the tutors. This group of peer tutors is also supported through the EWYL scheme.

In acknowledgment of the increasing student-led academic activities, a student coordinator will be selected every year (from 2016 onwards, as a member of Student Academic Council) to help the faculty in-charges in ensuring regular conduct of the sessions, identifying competent tutors, and establishing a mutual coordination among the tutors of various peer group led sessions.

It is promising to note that the involvement of peers is greatly helping us in reaching out to students more effectively and it is gradually shaping as a valuable resource for the first and second year students. Further, in addition to the recipients, the students serving as peer-educators are also benefiting immensely in the process of executing their responsibilities. The peer-educators have a rewarding and satisfying experience as they explore themselves while serving the community. We are hopeful that this support scheme of involving peer educators will make seminal positive impacts in the lives of students.