

Dear Peer Leader,

My name is Sarah Hammons, and I just finished my first semester as a U101 Peer Leader! I am studying psychology and neuroscience and have a passion for linguistics. I am from Oak Ridge, Tennessee, home of the Oak Ridge National Lab and Tee Higgins. I decided to come to Carolina my senior year of high school without much thought. I figure the University of Tennessee was too close to home, and both my parents went to graduate school there, so I wanted to switch it up. My brother is a freshman this year at UTK, so at least one of us followed in my parents' footsteps. I got into the Honors College and was sold on USC. I decided I wanted to be a Peer Leader because my freshman year was a hard one, and U101 allowed me to freely talk about my struggles with those in the same position as me. Freshman Sarah would be so proud of the confidence I have gained over my years in college and how I have gained the opportunity to help future freshman. U101 was an awesome experience for me, and I am so proud to be in such an awesome program as a Peer Leader.

Being a Peer Leader was incredibly rewarding. I remember getting the email saying I had been nominated as a potential Peer Leader and receiving the link to sign up for interviews. Through the interview process, I learned a lot about how I present myself in group settings and how that would apply to a classroom setting. I was able to meet my co-instructor over the summer, and we instantly bonded over our communication styles and love of shopping. We would get coffee or lunch to go over lesson plans and how the syllabus would be arranged. I see her on campus all the time, and I am looking forward to potentially working with her again. I would say one of the biggest struggles I faced in the time approaching the fall semester was how to approach the students as someone who was experienced in college in the way they were not yet, but to come across as helpful rather than intimidating. I was also not looking forward to an 8:30 am section, but our attendance was pretty good considering how early class was. One of my

biggest accomplishments was connecting with one of the students I was having the most trouble getting a good read on. Some days she would be my best friend, and other days she would give me a weird amount of attitude. However, by the end of the semester, she and I were able to consistently have good conversations in class. I think it is very important to be persistent with your group of students as it may take a little work to reach a good connection, but it is totally worth it!

This semester has taught me a lot about time management. While the work I put into U101 was incredibly rewarding, sometimes I did not want to get up for the early class or eat lunch a little later on Wednesdays so I could meet with my co-instructor. I think garnering a passion for your position throughout the semester is a part of the Peer Leader experience, and for me it was a natural process. One of my goals was to be as helpful as possible to the students, including providing an outlet for communication outside of that with my co-instructor. I led the GroupMe for my class and had many one-on-ones without my co-instructor. These experiences really allowed me the opportunity to push myself to be as honest and open with the students as possible. I was also able to teach a few of the lesson by myself, something I was nervous but excited for. I have never been super strong in my public speaking skills, but teaching in a low-stakes environment on topics I am knowledgeable and passionate about fostered growth in that area of my skill set. My class was also very receptive to my anecdotes about times that were maybe a little embarrassing or awkward for me to talk about which I am grateful for.

The position of Peer Leader is a balance between a position of authority and friendship with the students. I think my ability to switch between these two different approaches has improved greatly and plays into my adaptability in other situations. The interview process really prepared me for the interviews I encountered afterwards and allowed me to present myself in a professional manner. EDLP 520 taught me many lessons as well. I love that I was able to hash

out the issues I was facing in my class with others in my position. Not only did we discuss U101 related issues, but I was also in a class with an awesome group of dedicated students who were able to discuss other aspects of university life that affect us as upperclassmen. There was also a very obvious and yet helpful connection between being on the receiving end of certain instruction/lessons and then implementing them into the facilitation of a lesson. Several of the activities we did in EDLP 520 were ones I brought to my co-instructor to use in our U101 class, and they were all highly successful. One of the most helpful lessons, however, was specific to us as Peer Leaders and explored how we should sell our leadership experiences as a Peer Leader to anyone reading our resumes. I plan to use the language and skills I learned in that class to not only talk about this experience, but also those outside of EDLP and U101.

Overall, the experience of Peer Leading is something I will never forget, and I hope many Peer Leaders in the future have the learning experiences, struggles, and overall joy I had during this semester and hopefully for another to come.

Best,

Sarah Hammons