Peer Connections Program – Online Peer Chats
UC Riverside, 2009

Introduction

The Peer Connections Mentoring Program (Online Peer Chats) was created by Jami Grosser in 2007 for the University of California, Riverside LGBT Resource Center. The LGBTRC has run Peer Chats for the past two academic years (2007-08 and 2008-09). Toi Thibodeaux began coordinating the program in November 2008.

Peer Connections existed for two years prior to the online peer chats as a more traditional mentoring program matching mentors and mentees for in-person interactions. We found that few students accessed the program. Many waited until late in the academic year to request a mentor, and students often would not respond to invitations to meet with mentors. Online peer chats are a different way to outreach to students, especially those unwilling to step inside the LGBT Resource Center and those not yet comfortable with one-on-one, in-person interactions.

A separate Training Manual exists with 50 pages of resources (table of contents included in this packet). Questions regarding the Peer Connections Mentoring Program may be directed to Nancy Tubbs, nancy.tubbs@ucr.edu or 951.827.2267.

Contents

1. Program Goals
2. 2009-10 Peer Support Buddy Job Description
3. 2008-09 Statistics Overview
4. 2008-09 Sticky Situations
5. 2008-09 Topics List
6. 2008-09 Training Manual Contents
7. Peer Chat User Log and Tracker Examples

Peer Connections Mentoring Program
Goals

Mission Statement:

Peer Connections is a peer support program that seeks to create and broaden opportunities for students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, as well as students who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity or are in the process of coming out here at UC Riverside. Trained Peer Support Buddies connect students to campus resources and community, serving as a mentor through confidential one-on-one interactions and online chats.

Goals:

1. To connect participants (new, incoming LGBT students), or students who might not otherwise utilize these services, to campus and the LGBT Resource Center resources & community.

2. To assist participants and peer support buddies in their sexual orientation and/or gender identity development.

3. To assist in the persistence (retention) of peer chatters at UCR.

4. To align with Chancellor Cordova's (2003) Announcement, *A Campus of Respect*: "We cannot build the community of learners and scholars that we desire if we cannot feel secure from fear and violence associated with our person, our culture, our heritage, our sexuality, our religion, or our individual life-styles."

   Therefore, we further intend to provide a safe, supportive environment for those who need it, inclusive of students of color, women, students of faith, students with disabilities, bisexual students, transgender and genderqueer students.

Position Description - Peer Support Buddies
2009-10 Academic Year

Mission Statement:

The Peer Connections Mentoring Program seeks to create opportunities, through on-line chats, for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and questioning students to connect with peers for support and resources.

Peer Connections Support Buddies are undergraduate and graduate students who are knowledgeable of the issues related to coming out and how they may affect the lives of their peers. Peer Support Buddies (PSB) use their life experiences, a training program, and ongoing education to assist their peers. PSBs are available to listen to concerns, offer insight on certain issues, and make referrals to campus and community resources. Peer Support Buddies are peer helpers, not counselors.

Qualifications:

Peer Connection Support Buddies should:

- Have great verbal & written communication skills
- Be able to listen actively and utilize appropriate interpersonal skills
- Be knowledgeable of issues relating to coming out around sexual orientation and gender identity, and how it intersects with race, culture, religion, gender, class, etc.
- Be able to work with diverse populations
- Be open-minded and flexible
- Be willing to learn new things about themselves and those they work with
- Have basic computer knowledge of PCs and Macs
- Have a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher

Responsibilities:

Peer Connection Support Buddies will be required to:

- Attend the Peer Connections 3-day Training program the week before fall classes. [September 21-23, 2009]
- Be available on Monday nights from 6-9:30pm during weeks 2-9 of each quarter.
- Be a presence at Q-Camp, the LGBT Resource Center Open House, and other events as necessary.
- Maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.5, and GPA of at least 2.0 each quarter. Students may be required to do an academic grade check-in.
- Commit up to 5 hours a week for the position.

This is an unpaid, volunteer position.

Peer Connections Online Peer Chats 2008-09 Statistics

Peer Chat Numbers
[Not including participation by Support Buddies]

- 21 total chats (7 in fall, 6 in winter, 8 in spring) [previous year = 23]
- 146 total attendance for all chats combined [previous year = 70]
- Average participation per chat (overall) = 6.95
- Average participation per chat (fall) = 4.42
- Average participation per chat (winter) = 8.33
- Average participation per chat (spring) = 8.12
- 48 different users chatted [previous year = 34]
- 80% are students of color (see more demographics below)
- 3 male students of color registered but did not chat
- 9 people entered the Lobby but did not register and did not chat
- 16 users participated multiple times, with a mean of 6.44 times each and a median of 4 times each
- 4 trained Support Buddies also participated in the chats. They include 2 men and 2 women (3 Latino/Chicano-identified and 1 black-identified).

Peer Chatter Demographics
[Excludes students who did not log on to chat, even if they registered; and excludes Support Buddies] *N = 48*

Race/Ethnicity:
39 or 80%   People Of Color [previous year = 94%]
      13   Asian Pacific Islander [previous year = 18]
            4   Chinese
            4   Filipino
            4   Korean (1 international student)
            1   Vietnamese
      6   Black/African American [previous year = 4]
      20   Chicano/a or Latino/a (14/6) [previous year = 10]
      1   Multi (Chicano/Filipino)

3   White/Caucasian [previous year = 1]
2   Other
3   Decline to State / Restricted / Unknown [previous year =1]

Sex (we are limited to the options offered with the Student Information system)
24   Male [previous year = 21
24   Female [previous year = 13]

Year in School:
11   Freshmen [previous year = 14]
12   Sophomores [previous year = 5]
14   Juniors [previous year = 9
6   Seniors [previous year = 3]
1   International Exchange
2   Admit (not yet UCR student)
2   Unknown [previous year = 3]

Sticky Situations
Peer Connections Online Chats 2008-09

1. Without access to SIS verifying student info at the time of the chat is a problem, especially if there is a crisis situation that requires immediate access to the student. We are going through the process for LGBTRC professional staff to get SIS access.

2. There is no way to prevent chatters from private chatting one another. Private chats should be used for PSB's to deal with sensitive issues that chatters would like to keep private. So, we remind chatters that private chatting is for contacting PSB's only.

3. There is no way to tell if a user is actually a UCR student at the time of the chat. The chatters are asked to give their SID and other personal info. However, if the person lies and falsifies info there is no way to tell until someone with access to the SIS verifies the info.

4. High school students and transfer students may access the Peer Chat, because they have a valid SID. This may be a problem if the student is under 18. This may also be a problem if the student is out of state or we are unable to access the student in a crisis situation.

5. There have been times when chatters have spoken to an ex-partner in private chats and revealed who they are and started arguing over past relationship issues. It is at the discretion of the chatter to decide if they wish to remain anonymous.

6. There have been times when PSB's have spoken to ex-partners, but the chats are anonymous and they do not know the chatter's identity.

7. International students do not have a regular SID and it is difficult to get any info for them in case of a crisis situation.

8. There have been times when students have attempted to "out" other students and find out information about other students in the main chat room and in private chats.

9. Chatters have posted links and pictures in the main chat room in the past. We have turned off the ability to post pictures, because a chatter who did not want or need anonymity posted a picture.

10. Chatters can create profiles, but we have discouraged this process. However, at one point a student did put their picture in the profile section.

11. I have found that some students have exchanged their personal information so that they can chat through other online programs.

Compiled by Toi Thibodeaux.

SIS – Student Information System
SID – Student Identification Number
PSB – Peer Support Buddy

Comprehensive Topics List
Peer Connections Online Chats 2008-09

1. Coming Out
   - *On Campus* - Multiple students have had discussions about how to come out on campus. Many students have expressed concerns with coming out to faculty and staff members. Some students have expressed concerns about coming out within Greek organizations.
   - *With Family* – When, if and how one comes out to family.
   - *To Friends* – How does one come out to friends? For students who have already come out, how one copes with losing friends.
   - *At Work* – The concept of when to come out at work and issues around promotions and using anonymous hotlines to report discrimination.

2. Not Coming Out
   - There have been discussions of why people choose to stay in the closet. Also, the concept of staying in the closet at work and around different categories of people one associates with (family, co-workers, friends, classmates, etc).

3. Labels and Identity
   - There have been multiple discussion about labels and identity. Many questions about what labels mean to different people and why people choose to label themselves.
   - There are often questions about what different labels mean within different communities (bear, twink, otter, metrosexual, downlow, etc).

4. Gender Issues
   - Discussions about difficulties that queer women and men go through because of their gender identity.
   - A couple of conversations actually revolved around Disney's portrayal of gender.

5. Body Image
   - Students have spoken about body image issues and eating disorders.

6. Ageism
   - This topic has been brought up a couple times. How old is too old to date? At what age should people stop going out to clubs? Age has sparked a few lengthy discussions.

7. Relationships

- o There have been numerous discussions about relationships and relationship issues. Most of the time folks want to bounce scenarios off of one another and talk about problems they are having.
- o There are a lot of issues with breakups from both sides.
- o Sometimes people have never been in relationships and want to chat about the "how to" of starting LGBT relationships and "gaydar."

8. Hooking Up
- o This is a popular topic, because many students want to define the concept of "hooking up." What makes a "hook up?" The ethical slut concept is tossed around and it usually makes a lively discussion. Also, chatters often have a difference of opinion about what "hooking up" looks like physically, mentally, and emotionally.

9. Religion & Spirituality
- o This is also a popular topic within Peer Connections. Most of the time students are conflicted due to religious affiliations and the concept of coming out. At times, we have chatted about specific religions and the concept of being spiritual without having a religious affiliation.

10. Dating
- o People ask about where to take dates in Riverside. Also, students have discussed issues about dating versus committed relationships.
- o People have asked about where to find dating partners.

11. Prejudice In The LGBT Community
- o The concept of prejudice within the LGBT community. For example, the prejudices bisexual and fluid-identified people deal with. Issues around the bias faced by queer people of color.

12. Safe Sex
- o The concept of hooking up and being safe.

13. Queer Communities
- o There have been various discussions of different types of cultures and sub-cultures within the LGBT community.

14. Suicide
- o There have been times when students have felt a sense of hopelessness and PSB's have helped the situation. The PSB's have also given chatters crisis center information and UCR counseling center information just in case they needed to actively speak to a crisis counselor.

15. Stereotypes
    o There have been a lot of discussions about stereotypes and the perpetuation of stereotypes from both inside and outside of the LGBT community.

16. Getting Involved
    o Students often ask about ways to be more active and involved on campus. PSB's have given the students various options such as visiting the LGBTRC and the various student organizations.

17. Resistance Without Violence
    o Talks about ways to challenge homophobia on UCR's campus through peaceful demonstrations, i.e. what to do when "hate preachers" come to campus and say homophobic slurs.

18. Queer Arts and Culture
    o Some students have asked about LGBT friendly businesses and establishments within the university area and surrounding cities.

19. Trans Issues
    o Students came to the chat to talk about questioning identity and gender.
    o Students talked about the grief and trouble that come with questioning one's gender, i.e. avoiding class, coping mechanisms and suicidal thoughts.

List compiled by Toi Thibodeaux, with suggestions by Peer Support Buddies (PSB's).

Peer Connections Training Manual Contents

Peer Support Buddy Guidelines, Expectations, & Resources
Program Goals
Support Buddy Job Description
Program Expectations
Time Expectations
Team Expectations, Supervisor Expectations
UCR Resources
IE Resources

Working with Queer Students
Obstacles to Overcome in Developing a Positive LGBT Identity
Coming Out: A Basic Understanding of the Issues
Stages in Coming Out
Risk Factors Confronting Lesbian and Gay Youth
Dos and DON'Ts of Working with LGBT Youth
Diagram of Sex, Gender, and Sexuality
Working with Questioning Students

Working Within an Intercultural Setting
Identity Development of Oppressed People
Awareness Among Members of Agent Groups With Respect to Oppressed Groups
Summary of Minority Development Model
Internalized Oppression
There Is No Hierarchy of Oppression
How to Interrupt Oppressive Behavior
Attributes of a Culturally Competent Student

Helping & Listening Skills
Tips for Successful Mentoring
Peer Mentor, Know Thyself
Advice Versus Interpersonal Communication
Effective Interpersonal Communication
Cultural Differences in Communication

Peer Chats
How To Use ChatBlazer
ChatBlazer User's Guide

PEER CHAT USER LOG - 2008-2009

	Last Name	First Name	Student ID	Screen Name	Password	Date Added	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Year
1				PSB-SAMMY	buddy1				
2				PSB-KRIS	buddy2				
3				PSB-PAT	buddy3				
4				PSB-KIM	buddy4				
5				happygirl	chat201	10/6/08			
6				highlander	chat202	10/6/08			
7				catlover	chat203	10/6/08			
8				toocool	chat204	10/13/08			
9									
10									
11									
12									
13									
14									
15									
16									
17									
18									
19									
20									

*BOLD - indicates information based upon interaction. Strikethru means did not chat.
DTS - Declined to State

PEER CHAT TRACKER - 2008 - FALL QUARTER

DATE	CHATTERS	TOTAL
10/6/08	(highlander), (happygirl), (catlover)	3
10/13/08	(toocool), catlover, highlander	3
10/20/08		
10/27/08		
11/3/08		
11/10/08		
11/17/08		
11/24/08		
12/1/08		
	TOTAL - ATTENDANCE ALL 8 CHATS COMBINED	
	TOTAL - USERS	
	AVERAGE # PER CHAT	

*BOLD - indicates first time chatter
() BOLD - indicates lobby only no registration

Peer Chat Tracker - By User - 2008-2009

Chatter	Peer Chat Dates	Total Times
catlover	10/6/08, 10/13/08	
happygirl	10/6/08	
highlander	10/6/08, 10/13/08	
toocool	10/13/08	

Average
Total Users