Transforming the Peer Leadership Role: How and Why the Worlds Changed

Leah Rotella | lrotella@albany.edu
Student Engagement Community Coordinator

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York
Acknowledgements

Dr. Linda Krzykowski
Assistant Vice Provost for Student Engagement

Dr. Jeanette Altarriba
Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education

Sheri Stevens
Director, Community and Public Service Program
Why did you attend this session?
What are the Worlds?

- 21 Freshman Living-Learning Communities (L-LCs)
- 5 Transfer Living-Learning Communities

- Oldest: World of Business *(pilot program 2010-2011)*

- Total Students for 2015-2016: approx. 550
Who are the World Ambassadors (WAs)?

World Ambassadors are sophomores who were in the Living-Learning Communities the previous year. They connect with the freshmen over the summer and assist the Community Assistant throughout the year.
What were the World Ambassadors doing?

Up to and including fall 2015, WAs:

- Sent e-mails to L-LC students in July/August answering questions and sharing information.
- Invited L-LC students to a World-specific Facebook group and monitored that platform (typically until the 2nd week of the semester).
What were the World Ambassadors doing?

Up to and including fall 2015, WAs:

- Welcomed their freshmen at a Kick Off event for all the Worlds
- Facilitated a campus-wide L-LC scavenger hunt on traditional freshman move-in day
What were the freshmen saying?

2014-2015 L-LC freshmen said...

75.6% found the interactions with their World Ambassador during Opening Weekend to be at least moderately valuable.

54.6% found getting to know their World Ambassador and fellow L-LC students over the summer via Facebook and e-mail to be at least moderately valuable.
What were the freshmen saying?

2014-2015 L-LC freshmen said...

- The world ambassadors to me are very pointless. My world ambassadors did not show up to anything after the first week of school and were not involved in our world at all. I do not even know their names anymore because they were not involved at all. To me the LLC would be just as good if not better without the positions of world ambassadors.
- Ambassadors didn’t really contribute or help us adjust too much. They were helpful in the beginning of the first semester, but not since then.
- The world ambassadors were terrible. We met them a total of 3 times all year.
- My ambassadors were useless.
- Most people forgot the ambassadors names.
- The world ambassadors. We met them maybe once throughout the whole year.
- Get World Ambassadors more involved with events, we like hearing about their experience.
- World Ambassadors weren’t very active at all.
- The world ambassadors did not do much
Why the disconnect?

*Freshmen were holding WAs to standards higher than the ones Student Engagement had set for the WAs.*
Hello World Ambassadors,

I hope the first full week of classes went well for you! Thank you to those of you who have remained very active with your Worlds once classes began; I’ve seen a lot of WA Facebook posts and support for CA programs/meetings.

Acknowledging that not all CAs were undergraduate students at UAlbany and may not have a ton of Great Dane pride (yet!), we are hoping to promote two WA-led walking groups from State Quad and Indian Quad to Bob Ford Field for next Saturday’s first home football game. While some Worlds may go to the game together, not all Worlds plan on doing this, and we want to make sure that the L-LC students from those Worlds still have an opportunity to join others in the Student Engagement family to go see the game.

Please let me know if you would like to help facilitate one of those walking groups next Saturday 9/12 at approximately 2:30 pm. While ideally we would like you to stay for the game with the students, our top priority is having you help students get to the stadium, enjoy whatever Great Dane Game Day activities are being hosted, and then get student seated in time for the 3:30 pm kickoff. There is a good chance we will have your purple World Ambassador t-shirts in time for this event (more information forthcoming)!

Thank you for your help,

Leah Rotella
Student Engagement Community Coordinator
Office of Undergraduate Education
University at Albany
1400 Washington Avenue - LC 31
Albany, NY 12222
What were the freshmen saying?

2015-2016 L-LC freshmen said…

- I felt as though our world ambassadors could have been more involved in our first semester experience.
- There could be more support from the World Ambassadors
- Reinforce the presence of WAs
- I couldn’t even try to list you a time when I saw [the WAs], and I can’t even remember a single name/what [they] look like.
- We never really did much with the LLC students from last year (WA’s)
- Current World Ambassador wasn’t involved after the first weekend
- Interactions with my WA’s were not valuable in my L-LC experience so far.
- Ensure that the WA’s maintain contact with the freshmen.
- Our World Ambassadors were never around.
- I wish I had more time with the WAs
- Have the World Ambassadors help plan more events and be more involved.
2015-2016 Action Steps:

October 2015: Focus Group with AY 15-16 World Ambassadors

February 2016: Proposed changes to World Representatives

April 2016: WA Selection, training, and registration in RSSW 190

January 2016: Began communication with Director of CPSP re: RSSW 190 option

March 2016: Updated World Ambassador application process

June 2016: Beginning of WA cycle for AY 16-17
What were the freshmen asking?

Name: ________________________________

L-LC: ________________________________

One question I still have about being in an L-LC:

________________________________________________________________________

One idea of a fun activity our L-LC could do together:

________________________________________________________________________

All ideas for activities will be shared with your Community Assistant!

---

Allyson Shapiro
August 1, 2016

Hey guys! Time to answer another question
Question#4: What occurs during our meetings?

So we meet twice a week with our professor Sheri Stevens. During our discussion class with Sheri we often plan community service trips and she gives us great advice on how to be successful college students. During our lunch time we usually catch up on how everyone's doing, and talk about social justice issues. Last year we also met once a week on our floor with our Community Assistant to hang out, plan community service trips, and plan other fun activities like getting ice cream, having a game night, or going to a sports game together.

If you guys have any other questions just ask in the group or send Murm and me an email!

---

Sheri Stevens
August 1, 2016

Can’t wait to meet everyone!
What are the WAs doing?

RSSW 190 Community Engagement for World Ambassadors - Fall 2016

Course Manager: Sheri Stevens
Email: sstevens@albany.edu
Office: Social Sciences 112
Phone: 442-5683
FAX: 442-5684
Office Hours: Drop in or by appointment
CPSP Office Hours: M-F 9:00am-4:30pm

Instructor/Supervisor: Leah Rotella
Email: Irotella@albany.edu
Office: LI 31
Phone: 442-2533
Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Founded in 1970, the Community and Public Service Program (CPSP) has played an important role in facilitating student community engagement in the Greater Capital Region. Administered by the University at Albany’s School of Social Welfare, CPSP offers students in all academic disciplines the opportunity to engage in community service while earning course credit.

Students volunteer at area not-for-profits or public organizations that they select from among the approximately 400 approved CPSP partner organizations. Each student develops a Learning Contract, completes a Reflective Journal, Media Reflection and an Electronic Media Project and completes 35 hours of volunteer service for credit.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
The primary objective for all Community and Public Service courses is to promote community engagement activities via university and community partnerships. Students have an opportunity to gain insight into how civil society and the public sector operate in a democratic society. The goal is for participants to understand the impact of their service on meeting community needs as well as to explore the meaning of democratic citizenship in a multicultural society. The purpose of the course is to foster a lifelong commitment to service and democratic civic engagement.
**RSSW 190: Learning Contract**

**Name of Organization:** Student Engagement, Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

**Purpose of the Organization:** Our role as World Ambassadors of Living-Learning Communities helps facilitate students transition into this new and exciting environment. We help student’s take advantage of every opportunity they are presented with, both academically and recreationally while fostering the growth of long lasting relationships with peers and faculty.

**Organization’s Mission Statement:** The Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education works to provide opportunities and pathways for students to be active and engaged in their studies, both inside and outside the classroom.

**Name of Supervisor:** Leah Rotella

**Job Description:** As a World Ambassador I will serve as a peer mentor and resource to incoming freshmen and work to the best of my ability to help them get the most out of their freshmen experience. Some of my responsibilities will include: planning community service events, organizing meetings with current L-LC students, and maintaining open lines of communication between my co-WA, CA, and faculty advisor.

**Schedule of Volunteer Hours:** Subject to change

**Learning Objectives**

One skill I would like to improve upon would be my public speaking skills and interpersonal skills as a whole. Being in this position will require me to communicate with others and I know having this position as a WA will help me to communicate effectively.

I will deepen my understanding of L-LC students by creating a safe and comfortable environment for them and listening to any questions, comments or concerns they may have as well as asking for any improvements they may have for the L-LC program at its conclusion. I will also keep an open mind and listen to others hopes and goals for the year, peers and faculty alike.

I will learn about my organizations purpose by asking as many questions about student engagement as a whole and engaging myself in as many volunteer and leadership opportunities as possible.

(student)

Leah Rotella (Supervisor)
World Ambassadors said...

- I never had that strong WA support and that is what I want to be for my LLC.
- I chose to be a World Ambassador to open the eyes of the freshmen to prove that “once a member always a member.”
- I chose to be a World Ambassador because I wanted the freshmen to have a better experience than I had.
- I chose to be a World Ambassador this year because I wholeheartedly believe that every class of incoming freshmen should have a better experience than the class previous to them.
- I only saw my WAs once and I feel if I had a more consistent experience with them, I would have had a better first semester.
- I realized, in terms of the “Golden Circle”, that my “What” is that I am a World Ambassador. My “How” is because I was given the position as a World Ambassador, therefore I help the new LLC freshmen become accustomed to college life. My “Why” is a question I’ve never been asked before.
Write your Reflective Journal here

By midterm point, you will have been involved as a World Ambassador longer than most WAs before you.

Please discuss how your WA experience has been so far and what you hope to accomplish with the remaining half of the fall semester.

Be sure to address the following questions in your reflection:

- In your own words, how can L-LCs impact the freshman year experience?
- What is your role in the work to make this happen?
- So far, has your WA experience met and/or exceeded your expectations? Why or why not?
- How do you hope this experience will impact your future?

Use the following quote to inspire your writing:

"Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those bits of good put together that overwhelm the world"  Archbishop Desmond Tutu

- 200 word minimum (and again, yes we do count)
- Enter your Reflection clicking on "Write Submission" (after clicking on the "Write your Reflective Journal here" above.)
- DO NOT ATTACH A DOCUMENT - though feel free to write in Word and copy and paste into the submission box.
The Electronic Media Project is an opportunity for you to creatively display what you have learned through your service to the Living-Learning Communities. You will be asked to showcase the "top 10 reasons for being in an LLC," pulling from both your own LLC experience last year and your experience as a World Ambassador this fall. You should not just say "because you make friends" - tell us specifically! This is your opportunity to humanize and personalize the LLC experience more than any printed brochure can do. This project may be completed by using a variety of multimedia including, but not limited to, video, PowerPoint, and Prezi. Please do not start this project before attending the WA Meeting on Tuesday, October 4th (location TBD), at which you will receive more guidelines.

At the October 4th meeting, you will select a constituency to cater your project towards. Possible constituencies include:

- high school seniors
- high school guidance counselors
- parents of high school seniors
- admitted freshmen
- LLC applicants
- University admissions counselors
- University administrators

Your "Top 10" should align with your constituency, and your completed Electronic Media Project may be shared with your constituency as future Student Engagement promotional materials. At the October 4th meeting, you will be asked to choose a constituency, so begin thinking about which one you would like to focus on. You may propose a constituency not on the list, too. You may complete this project individually or work with one other World Ambassador.

Technical support is available through the University Library's Interactive Media Center. They offer a wide array of services and support.

You must be able to submit your project electronically. If Blackboard is having trouble with the type of media file, find another way to provide us with the project. For example, if you create a video and it is too large to upload to Blackboard, post it to YouTube on a private channel and provide us with the link. Don't wait until the last minute to decide how you will submit it!
100.0% of World Ambassadors received a Satisfactory grade and earned one academic credit for their fall 2016 service to their Living-Learning Communities.

68.6% of World Ambassadors logged more than their required 35 hours of service to their Living-Learning Communities.

89.5% of World Ambassadors have agreed to remain involved with their Living-Learning Community students in spring 2017 on a volunteer basis.
What are the freshmen saying?

2015-2016 L-LC World Representatives said*…

- The World Ambassadors are really cool
- The World Ambassadors [are the best thing about the L-LC]
- The WAs and CAs are really cool
- We interact well with each other and our WA

* Anonymous feedback reported during an October Advisory Board meeting

2015-2016 L-LC freshmen said*…

Q44. What has been most memorable about your first six weeks at the University at Albany?

- Meeting everyone from my LLC
- Without [the L-LC], I’m not sure I would still be at this school or at least want to be at this school.
- Making very strong connections with many people I would not have otherwise [met] if I weren’t in an LLC.

* Qualitative responses from within 2016 Student Affairs Great Dane Welcome survey
Where do we go from here?

- **Reevaluation of RSSW 190 logged hours:** *What counts? What doesn’t count?*

- **How do we hold WAs accountable in the spring?** *How do we engage them?*

- **How do we combat the challenges WAs are citing in their journaling?**
  - *Students aren’t on Facebook. How do we meet them where they are?*
  - *Freshmen aren’t checking their UAlbany e-mail in the summer… WAs are frustrated…*
  - *If freshmen aren’t engaging in the L-LC, how can WAs still complete their hours?*

- **Do we add World Ambassadors to the transfer L-LCs?**

- **Creation of a World Diplomat (junior-year) position for fall 2017!**
Questions?

Leah Rotella | lrotella@albany.edu
Student Engagement Community Coordinator

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York