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Introduction

Dear SAM student,

Welcome to Seminar of Academic Mentoring (SAM), Fall 2020 edition! We are so glad you are here, and we look forward to see how you grow into your mentoring and leading styles.

With SAM, we aim to prepare the new generation of Peer Mentors and Peer Leaders, with the guidance of instructors and past SAM students who learned important lessons during their first semester as mentors/leaders.

Every year, the SAM students choose a theme for their final project, through which they will impart their wisdom and advice. This year's book (and audiobook!) is in the kitchen. With the title being "Fe Chef: Anyone Can Cook", the theme also indicates the ideas that we want you to pass on to your students. Anyone in our General Chemistry courses is capable of succeeding! And Peer Mentoring and PLTL are here to help.

In the first section of the book, the theme is "Mise en Place", which is a French culinary term meaning "putting in place". This part of the book has four subsections, one with four people writing about before the first session, one has another four people writing topics regarding the implementation of the first session (during the session), and last, but not least, a subsection where two people write about reflecting on the first session.

Before the first session, last year's SAM students guide you through what to do: setup and/or layout of the room, dealing with nerves before the session, planning out your session and refreshing your memory on the material, and establishing ground rules.

During your first session, you get advice about how to implement icebreakers, introduce the idea of having a growth mindset, how to use the collaborative learning strategies (CLS), and making a good first impression.

For after your first session, the advice focuses on getting a gauge for potential dominant/quiet students, and congratulating yourself for finishing your first session and thinking about everything you learned to implement in future sessions.

In the second section of the book, "Adjusting the Recipe", you will find tips and tricks to improve your sessions over the course of the semester. Essays will be discussing how to "Find your Groove" in your session, timing during the session, types of warm-ups you can use in your session and possible hybrid strategies, and group dynamics.

The third section of this book is titled "Turning Up the Heat", to represent how to deal with added stress. At this point in the semester, things are getting harder, first exams are done, grades are coming out, and your Peer Mentoring/PLTL students are now used to your session. This is the

mid-semester slump! The pressure is on as a mentor/leader to keep up with our own work and keep all of your students motivated. This section should act as a guide for mentors/leaders struggling with the hardest part of the semester. The essays focus on: Goal setting for the rest of the semester (staying true to the recipe and trusting your instincts), handling the first session after the exam, grow mindset, self-care for both the mentor/leader and the students, adjusting the recipe (learning how to adapt Collaborative Learning Strategies), putting out fires at the start of a session (the importance of the first 10 minutes), Growth mindset and not assuming that students are doing poorly, learning the balance of talking about success and failure, a summary of mental health services and how to talk to a student that you are concerned about, what happens when you mess up in a session, dealing with the massive amount of information being thrown at students, and trusting yourself to adjust the recipe.

Finally, for the last section of the book, last year's SAM students chose the name "The Cherry on Top" because the end of Peer Mentoring/PLTL is bittersweet. As the sessions come to an end, you will want to look at the time left as something to enjoy and learn from. The same goes for the last PAM and SAM classes of the semester. In this section, essays discuss how to deal with tough evaluations and how to grow from them, tightening up the Peer Mentoring/PLTL philosophy in your group, keeping the group on track and motivated, perfecting and working on problem-solving strategies and facilitation, preparing for the next semester of facilitating, and enjoying the last sessions with your first group.

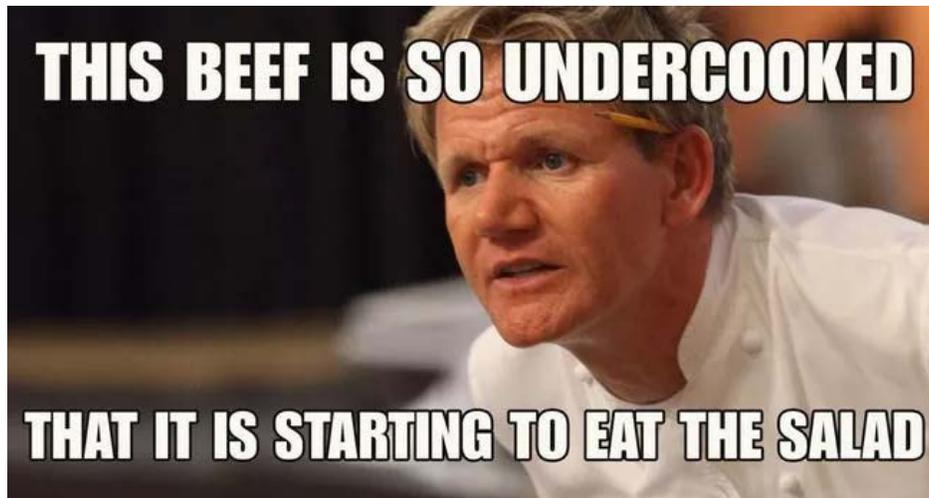
We are looking forward to work with you this semester! We are especially excited for when you get to share your own advice with the next generation of SAM students. On to the learning and growth!

Sincerely,

SAM Fall 2019 Students

T. Pottgen, MS, Project Coordinator for General Chemistry Supplemental Program

G. Szteinberg, Ph.D., Project Coordinator for General Chemistry Supplemental Program



Become Familiar with Your Kitchen

By Aidan Raikar

Congratulations on being chosen as a PLTL leader/Peer mentor! It's normal to be nervous for the first session, since you have never led one before, but remember that you were picked because the PLTL/Peer Mentoring team believed that you have what it takes to be a great PLTL leader/Peer Mentor. A day or two before your first session, you should email all of the members of your group with an introduction of yourself, location and time of the session, and what they should bring to the session (class notes, something to write with, and a calculator).

I would suggest going to your room 10-15 minutes before your session to see what the room is like. You will want to rearrange the room in order to best encourage your students to work together by moving or turning the desks or tables in the room. It's a good idea to have the students face each other so that it is very easy for them to work together. There might be a PLTL/Peer Mentoring session before you, so you might not be able to go in until 10 minutes before your session (due to the 10-minute rule). If you are nervous that 10 minutes is not enough to scope out your room, you could go see your room a day or two before your first session to make sure you know how to get there (and are able to help your students get there if they get lost). If the room is hard to get to, you should include instructions on how to get there in your first email to your PLTL/Peer Mentoring students.

Another important aspect of the first session is establishing the PLTL/Peer Mentoring philosophy and letting your students know what your role as a facilitator is. Going over the problem solving strategies and the expectations for the students clearly is a good way to make sure the students know how to participate properly during PLTL/Peer Mentoring and prepare for it.

Good luck on your first session! I hope this helped you think of good ways to prepare for it. One last tip: students love when their leader/mentor brings food!

Nerves Before Your First Session

By Mallika Tyagi

If you're reading this, congrats! You've made it past the essays and interviews to achieve this coveted spot as a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor! But now, the uphill climb continues. It's the night before your first session and you're panicking, thinking to yourself, what if I completely forget everything I've learned? Well, don't worry about that, because at some point in your PLTL/Peer Mentoring career, it will happen. But, it's ok, because we all have to remember that the growth mindset doesn't just apply to students; it applies to leaders as well.

The feeling of "I think they made a mistake choosing me to be a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor" always creeps up in the back of our minds at some point. Just remember that you deserve this position! You worked really hard for it, and you would not be a leader/mentor if someone did not have confidence in your abilities. It isn't expected that you know the answer to every question, but you are really good at learning the material, which is what makes you perfect for this job! Before my first session, I felt all my nerves kick in, but once the session started, I found out that it was actually a really enjoyable experience.

The community of PLTL leaders/Peer Mentors is an amazing resource you can always use if you're ever feeling stressed or unsure about anything. Oftentimes, I found that talking through things in SAM made me realize that I wasn't alone. I also realized that by listening to everyone's ideas through the discussion posts, I could improve my own session. While your first session can be a stressful experience, it is also extremely rewarding. This is where you get to build relationships that will brighten everyone's experience in Gen Chem. One of the most rewarding things about leading a PLTL/Peer Mentoring session is the feeling you get when a concept finally clicks in a student's brain all because of PLTL/Peer Mentoring.

Make sure to go over the material for a little bit before your session, to refresh your memory. Also, make sure to have an icebreaker in mind to start off. Your first session may go very well or it may be a little rougher than you imagined. Either way, you'll never get it back, so enjoy it while it lasts!

Preparing the Ingredients for your First Session

By Ethan Lewis

Hello, and congratulations on being picked to be a PLTL leader/peer mentor! Being chosen for this position is a huge accomplishment, so be proud of yourself!

Prior to your first session, you may be nervous about how you'll perform as a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor and whether or not you'll be able to effectively mentor your students. After all, it's been a full year since you've learned the material you're about to cover in your PLTL/Peer Mentoring session and you might be a bit rusty on Millikan's oil drop experiment and wavefunctions. Don't worry though! Every other PLTL leader/Peer Mentor is in the same boat as you and there are plenty of ways to make sure you're caught up on the packet material.

Before every PLTL/Peer Mentoring session, all leaders need to attend PAM and complete the week's packet. You may think that this will be enough to refresh your memory on the week's material, and while it is for some people, there's probably some information that was taught in lecture that isn't explicitly covered in the packet that your students may be confused about. Therefore, I'd recommend that you go over your old chemistry notes prior to attending PAM in order to refresh your memory on everything that was taught earlier that week. This way, you can use PAM not only as a resource to refresh your memory even further, but also as a way to test your knowledge of the material and see if you remember everything from your notes. If there's any material that you're still rusty on after the PAM session, take time to go over that part of your notes again to make sure you're fully prepared for your session.

Another way to prepare for your first session is to take come up with probing questions for your group. Think of difficult parts of the packet problems where your students could possibly get stuck and come up with questions to nudge them in the right direction. You should also come up with questions to enhance your students' understandings of the packet material in case your students find a problem particularly easy and fly through it. Probing questions are a great way to help facilitate your session, and you can never have too many!

Another great way to prepare for your first session is to make nametags for your students. Not only will name tags help you and your students learn each other's names, but they also help in terms of seating arrangements. Over the course of the next few sessions, I recommend that you mix the nametags up and have everyone sit with each other. This way, everyone will get to know each other and you can determine who works best with one another.

Finally, and this should come as no surprise, if you want to score extra brownie points with your students, bring snacks! Most of the students in your group will be freshmen who have no idea what PLTL/Peer Mentoring is, so be sure to lighten the mood and give them an idea of what PLTL/Peer Mentoring will be like by bringing in some food for them. Plus, who doesn't like free food? However, you shouldn't feel compelled to bring in snacks every day (if you really want to though, go for it!). Bringing in food every session can get expensive, so while bringing in snacks can help lighten the mood in your session, it obviously isn't necessary for you to be a good leader/mentor. Think of snacks as a cherry on top of an ice cream sundae. The ice cream is still going to be great without the cherry, but the cherry is a nice touch.

With all this in mind, you shouldn't worry too much about your first session. It's only natural to be nervous, but you'll do great. You were chosen to be a PLTL leader/peer mentor for a reason!

The Kitchen Code: Establishing Ground Rules

By Stephanie Ren

Congratulations on being chosen as a Chemistry PLTL Leader or Peer Mentor! You're probably reading this before the first session, feeling a mix of nervousness and excitement to meet and lead your first group! When you are preparing for the first session and planning out how to set up or which ice breakers to use, it's also important to remember to set some ground rules. The first session is a great opportunity to get a "vibe" going; having students start to get to know each other, and PLTL/Peer Mentoring, while also establishing your leadership style. Because it is many students' first times in a PLTL/Peer Mentoring group, the first day serves as a lasting impression on what kind of learning environment PLTL/Peer Mentoring is and how they should interact with you, each other, and the material.

Like every kitchen has its own rules and hierarchy, every PLTL/Peer Mentoring group has its own unique routines. As the executive chef, the PLTL leader/Peer Mentor sits at the top of the management structure, responsible for facilitating every aspect of the problem-solving machine but doing very little "cooking." As in any workspace, it's important to establish expectations and ground rules from the very minute that your team steps into the "kitchen." It can be intimidating for a first-time leader to assert themselves, and it is important to remember that while you are a peer, you must also communicate what kinds of behaviors you expect as a group. It is our job as facilitators to create a space where every student can benefit and learn, which could range from telling students how much phone use is allowed, whether you want to implement a break in the middle of the session, or whether food is allowed in sessions.

Before your first session, take some time to think about the precedent you would like to set for the year. You're coaching a brand-new team of "chefs" on their first day in a "professional kitchen," so it's a great opportunity to show them the right etiquette. After you go over the PLTL/Peer Mentoring philosophy, it can be a convenient time to let students know the expectations and guidelines so they know how their 2 hours will be spent each week. It is incredibly important to convey the benefits of PLTL/Peer Mentoring and to communicate expectations such as the no phone policy, because it "primes" students to take the sessions as opportunities for growth and intellectual stimulation. Take this time to remind students why they are here, and what makes these groups such valuable learning experiences. Feel free to bring your own experiences and stories into the mix, since many of the students may be freshmen and unfamiliar with the program's structure. Structuring your sessions to maximize engagement and create a conducive environment is an integral part of immersing students in the growth mindset.

If you get nervous like I do, I recommend making yourself a quick note of key points to go over on your first day. That way, while you are introducing the program to your group, you can easily glance down and recall other talking points. During my first PLTL session freshman fall, my leader started a "snack spreadsheet" where each week a different student would provide the group with a shareable snack. I loved this idea and wanted to implement it in my own group but got so nervous on the first day with setting up the room, doing introductions, sign ins, and hitting all my other talking points that I completely forgot to mention it! Even though I had been going over my mental checklist in my head, I missed a couple of my points when I actually went in front

of my group.

At the end of the day, just remember that the first session is just one of many. Even if, like me, you forget a couple of things, your preparation and dedication to the program will shine through. That's what growth mindset is all about; it's okay to try things out and adjust at any point throughout the semester. It's all part of the process! Best of luck with the rest of the semester, and welcome to the Gen Chem Family!

An Unfamiliar Basket of Ingredients

By Julia Hong

You may be asking yourself, “how do I become not awkward with my students?”. After all, they are only one or two years apart from you, and it may seem weird to have this “PLTL leader/Peer Mentor” status hovering over you like you’re a real authority figure. The answer to your question is actually quite simple: just be you. As cliché as it sounds, your PLTL leader/Peer Mentor status does not mean you have to act like a professor in charge of a class. In fact, what makes you special as a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor is that you are probably more relatable to your students and have the capability to make them feel comfortable in this new collaborative learning environment.

That being said, the best way to get everyone familiar with each other as well as you are icebreakers, the rite of passage for all incoming first years (which the majority of your students may be). I strongly recommend starting each session with some kind of icebreaker with the goals of having everyone remember everyone’s names and establishing that PLTL/Peer Mentoring is a place to debrief from their long week of classes. It can be as simple as asking everyone to say their name and “rose, bud, and thorn” for the previous week, or in other words, something good that happened, something they look forward to, and something bad that happened, respectively. It can also be as interactive as having groups find 10 things they have in common with people in their group, which can stir up interesting conversations and common ground. An icebreaker can also be physically active like having everyone grab someone’s hand and forming a human knot then trying to untangle it, which requires a lot of teamwork that will hopefully translate to when they’re solving the packet.

However way you choose to start your sessions, make sure the activity is inclusive to everyone, especially when it requires people to pull information from their personal life. It is important to emphasize common ground that everyone can relate to. For example, asking what your students did for summer vacation can show a disparity of privilege between students, since not everyone is able to go to the Bahamas, for example, which may result in some people feeling excluded. Instead, try asking more general questions that people are more able to relate to or non-personal questions like “what-ifs”.

Despite the annoyance some people may feel with icebreakers, it is an integral way to introduce new students with each other and you and ease them into problem-solving where they have to collaborate with each other. Leading your first PLTL/Peer Mentoring sessions may seem like “an unfamiliar basket of ingredients” each time, but the best way to get comfortable is to experiment with how you start your sessions, which will usually set the tone for the rest of the time you have. Feel free to change up the icebreakers, look up or think of new activities you can do, and have fun with it!

The Best Ingredients Allow You To Improve

By Monique Latif

Hello and welcome to the PLTL/Peer mentoring family! Congratulations, you were picked from many applicants and you were picked for a reason!

As you approach your first session, you might be both excited but also nervous if you don't exactly know what to expect. But that's ok - no one knows what to expect! Even with preparing beforehand, it is important to keep in mind that you may have to improvise and adjust to make the most out of your first session.

Throughout the semester, the growth-mindset will be a recurring theme. You will hear the term in almost every class and every discussion because it really gets at the core of the PLTL/Peer Mentoring philosophy. It allows for the fluidity needed to embrace challenges and learn from them. Before you can encourage your students to have a growth mindset when approaching Gen Chem, it is important that you also develop a growth mindset in how you facilitate your sessions. The best way to do this is to start your first session with a growth mindset.

Everyone's first session will have something unexpected happen. Before your first session, you should prepare by knowing where your room is, how you want to arrange the desks, having markers/chalk, which ice breakers to do etc. But you should also be aware that you will have to address issues you had not anticipated. Since there won't be a lot of time to prepare for dynamics that arise in your first session, the best way to approach these is with a "yes, and" mentality. Your group turns out to be very quiet? Yes, and if you can get a conversation going they might be more comfortable working with each other. More students than you expected come in late? Yes, and you can repeat a shorter version of an ice breaker so that they are still introduced to the rest of the group. There is no way of knowing what kind of group you will get and every group is different with countless scenarios that you simply cannot plan for. However, using an approach centered around growth mindset will allow you to work with what you have, starting from the first session.

As the semester moves forward, most of the talk about a growth mindset in facilitating your sessions will be in thinking of how you can improve for the following session. However, you will still have to be cognizant of how you will deal with issues that arise during your session and it is never too early to start practicing that skill. PLTL/Peer Mentoring facilitating is hard work! However, if you remain aware of how you are utilizing the facilitation strategies and give yourself credit for the effort you are putting in, I have no doubt that you will do great!

Different Cooking Methods, Same Dish

By Lauren Cumberbatch

Congratulations on being chosen to be a PLTL Leader or Peer Mentor for Chem 111A or 105! I know it will be overwhelming at times to balance your other schoolwork (and probably Orgo or Bio which are part time jobs), so make sure to always remember that you were chosen for this position for a reason, and that you have the skills necessary to successfully manage and conquer this semester. With that being said, you are still in the beginning stages of transitioning into your role as a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor. The most important thing to do is get to know your group as early as possible in the semester. By doing this, you can determine the most effective (and least effective) collaborative learning strategies (CLS) that maximize your group's collaborative environment. Beyond this, in most cases first time peer leaders/mentors have taken the specific General Chemistry course that they are leading (and all of us were PLTL students, and some were Peer Mentoring students). This means that although you must spend time reviewing the lecture material from week to week before PAM, less time needs to be centered around completing packets and more time can be allotted to choosing the best strategies for learning (round robin, scribe, small groups, etc.).

What works best for your group on a weekly basis is bound to change. Because you may not have time to come up with the best learning strategy for every problem each week, using the strategies suggested by Dr. Daschbach/Dr. Bakupog/Dr. Luo is a great framework to work off of. For example, scribe problems should go well with any group dynamic. You can choose a dominant student to be the scribe in order to keep them from answering the question all by themselves, or a student that you see is struggling with the material so that they will not feel embarrassed while asked to contribute to the solution. Whatever you choose, try to always have each person contribute a small part of the solution. The more people who give their ideas and perceptions, the more you can ask probing questions and maximize each individual student's understanding of the problem. As I said before, there will be traditional learning strategies that your group will not work best with. My group during my first year leading did not work well in small groups of 3-4 at the beginning of the semester. When this strategy alone was used, I found students work alone on the problem for a while and then stay silent if they were stuck, or if they found a solution they were satisfied with. To encourage collaboration using this CLS other than walking around during the quiet periods to ask probing questions, I would ask each group to write their solution on the board. In almost every situation, the student that solved the problem close to alone would go and put the answer on the board. After every group did this, I would ask the rest of the group to explain how the question was worked through, almost round robin style.

After seeing this strategy, groups were more inclined to make sure everyone knew what was going on, and the issue of working alone was solved.

As time goes on, knowing which collaborative strategies to use will get easier and easier. But as you are moving towards your first session, try to incorporate as much interaction as you can among your group so that most to all strategies will work as the students are comfortable with sharing their ideas, no matter how unconventional they sound. Using hybrid strategies like the small group/scribe/round robin mashup I described may work, but mixing your favorites

from when you were a PLTL student with the recommended ones is a great start as you begin to get to know your group. Successful group environments can be made by using different methods, just like multiple cooking methods can lead to the same dish in the end. Therefore, don't be afraid to try something new and different because there is room here in the first few sessions to make mistakes and grow from them. We need a growth mindset too. Good luck!

You Eat With Your Eyes First

By Bryce Cheng

If you're anxiously reading this the night before your first session, then you've come to the right place. First of all, I want to congratulate you for becoming a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor. This position is super rewarding but comes with a responsibility. If you're like me at this point in the semester, you're terrified, and that's okay. Take a deep breath and relax; everything's gonna be alright!

Just as the title suggests, making sure that you make a good first impression is essential. A good first impression will help you develop more confidence as a leader/mentor faster and signifies to your students that you are serious about your role as a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor. In other words, a good impression sets up what will be a productive but also fun semester. Hopefully, my advice will help you establish a good first impression and clarify any other concerns that you may have about your first session.

Before your first session even starts, send an email that introduces yourself and provides important information, such as where and when your sessions will meet (including directions), what to bring, and what topics will be covered. I like to send a message a couple of days before my session each week to remind my students if we're meeting that week and which topics will be covered. Especially before your first session, this email will be immensely helpful to your students and will demonstrate to them that you are a responsible leader/mentor who actually cares.

I would plan on arriving 10 minutes before the starting time of your session to scope the layout of your classroom. Reorganize the desks in a fashion that can accommodate both large and small group discussions. I personally recommend having a central island, where all the students face each other and then smaller islands in a couple corners of the room for when they need to split up into small groups or pairs. If another PLTL/Peer Mentoring session is occupying the room before your session, just glance a few times in the room from the outside and plan how you will reorganize the desks while you wait for them to finish. Furthermore, make sure to set up your laptop with the attendance page already pulled up and stack the PLTL packets (and any other material) and periodic tables neatly near it. Organizing the classroom before your session is important because it will make your sessions run comparatively more smoothly and so will give credibility to you as a leader/mentor in the eyes of your students.

As students walk in, be sure to greet them warmly. Be enthusiastic but don't be too enthusiastic. Ask for their name and make sure that they are in the correct PLTL/Peer Mentoring section. Introduce yourself and try to engage in a conversation. This will make your students both feel more comfortable and view you as welcoming and approachable, hopefully. Snacks, icebreakers, and music are never a bad idea either in order to further lighten the mood and alleviate some of the nerves inherent in everybody during the first session.

During your first session, establish not only the general PLTL/Peer Mentoring expectations but also your own. This includes policies about attendance, phone usage, etc. Convey these expectations with a more serious and confident tone so that way your students understand that these rules need to be followed. Moreover, if you see anybody breaking any of the rules during the first session, especially using phones distractingly, be sure to call them out

but do so respectably. This will leave the impression that you are serious about enforcing the rules and that consequences will follow unacceptable behavior.

Most important, above all of these, is to always believe in yourself. You got this position for a reason, after all. Your students can tell when you have or lack confidence, so make being confident a habit starting from the very first session. Best of luck with everything; I know you'll crush it!

Make the Recipe Your Own

By Desirae Bartos

First, Congratulations on being selected as a PLTL leader or Peer Mentor. Welcome to the family. You should be extremely proud of your accomplishment. The very first session is nerve wrecking for everyone, so do not feel alone in this. Remember that you always have a support system in SAM.

Think of your first session as a trial run. You are getting a feel for the room you will be in, the structure of the sessions and most importantly the different personalities you will be working with throughout the semester. It is important to remember that although your first session sets the tone for the rest of the sessions, there is still room to change, shift and improve your style of facilitating. The way you lead your first session will be very different than the way you lead your last. As you continue to get a feel for the type of students you have, their learning styles and who is dominant or quiet, your facilitation methods will change.

Some people can gauge their student's personalities based on the first session, if this is you then take note of that information and use it to your advantage. Leaders and mentors will either group their dominant students together or place them with the quieter students, it all depends on what works best for your group. However, if you are not able to gauge your student's personalities based on the first session then give it some time. Typically, by the second or third session students will start to come out of their shell a bit more, which makes the sessions more engaging because more students are willing to participate.

There are also situations where none of your students are particularly dominant or quiet. In this case you can have a bit more fun with groupings for small group or pair questions. This was the situation that my group had. Each week I would play around with the pairs making sure that my students were able to work with everyone in the session, which gave them the opportunity to both teach and learn from multiple people. It is also important to take note of how other leaders or mentors group their students in their sessions when you observe returning leaders/mentors because you can always switch up your style if you are inspired by another leader/mentor.

Finally, keep in mind that growth mindset does not only apply to the students, but to yourself as well. Use the trial run session as a starting point to plan your action steps towards improving for the next sessions to come. Do not ever doubt yourself and your abilities to be a PLTL leader or Peer Mentor because you deserve to have this position and are fully capable to finish out the semester strong. Use the SAM classes to learn from others and grow as a leader/mentor and remember that every essay in this book was written by someone who was standing in your shoes just a few months ago, so keep up the good work and best of luck this semester!

Bringing it all Together: Recap and Reflection

By Miguel Campos

Congratulations on getting through your first of (hopefully) many PLTL/Peer Mentoring sessions at your time here at WashU. Remember that you can only grow from dipping your toes in the seemingly cold water and you WILL become a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor that your students will learn to admire at the end of the semester, I promise.

You've hopefully taken a lot of from your first session, ranging from the best way to configure your room to who you can predict to be the dominant students of the group going forward. All of this is valuable information that you can use to transform your sessions into something that is unique to your style of leading. Your dish will be undoubtedly different from the dish of the person sitting next to you in SAM or PAM, and that's totally fine! Now, this isn't to say that you can't also occasionally take the advice from any of your peers on ways you could potentially add that last, scrumptious ingredient to your final masterpiece. If I had a nickel for every time that I heard something from one of my peers that I thought would help and actually did end up helping the dynamics of my sessions, I wouldn't have to worry about paying for tuition every semester. Slight hyperbole aside, make sure to contribute every now and then when you do your weekly reflections during SAM and PAM, somebody else might be going through the same thing and you never know if somebody else in the class has found an effective method that directly counters the issue you were dealing with in the first place. A friendly reminder that it is us against the material, and that includes your fellow PLTL leaders and Peer Mentors.

To bring things all together as the title of this essay indicates, let's do a quick recap of this first section of your SAM book. Aidan kicked us off by helping us setup the configuration of the room you will have complete control of for two hours a week for the rest of the semester. Mallika helped us calm those first session nerves which are totally understandable but able to be conquered, followed by Ethan's advice regarding planning the outline for what your first session would be like as well as provide insight on how to remember a topic that you potentially haven't practiced in a year since you first took Chemistry at WashU. Stephanie made sure to remind us that since it is our session, we set the ground rules and are responsible for setting those rules right from the get go to avoid conflicts in the future. Julia went into the fun stuff, icebreakers and how to break the awkward tension that is indeed possible to see in your first couple of sessions. Monique taught us the importance of growth mindset, a key concept that should be continuously stressed to your students throughout the lengthy duration of the semester. Lauren reintroduced us to the learning strategies that are a staple to the PLTL/Peer Mentor program, and how to mix and match them under varying circumstances to get to the same end goal. Bryce went on about making a first good impression to your students so that they don't hate your guts by the end of just one session. Desirae brought us to the finish line by allowing us to reflect on just how to improve based on the feel of your first session and determining what combinations of students might work the best under certain scenarios.

That was a lot, wasn't it? Sorry, I have a knack for writing way too much when I write essays. Anyway, I want you pat yourself in the back (no really, do it), you do so much for the Chemistry department and play a huge role in the success of the students, more than you will ever know in fact. Now, get ready to receive even more great advice from your wise elders in the next section. Good luck, you got this!

Variety is the Spice of Life: Changing Up Your Teaching Style

By Irene Antony

I hope you have been enjoying your first couple of sessions! As you may have noticed, depending on your students' moods and the lecture content, your sessions may go differently. This calls for you to similarly adapt your teaching style. As a Peer Mentor, these are some strategies I use, but they can be applied to PLTL as well.

For instance, depending on whether the lecture content is more conceptual rather than calculation-based, you can structure your session sessions differently. When it is calculation-based, you can mainly target practice problems (homework problem sets, trickier POGIL questions or even going over certain i-Clickers). When the lecture is more concept-based, my students find it more helpful to do a lecture recap. Often, I had the students email me beforehand what topics/terms were the most confusing. There is usually a lot of overlap in student concerns. It is always a good idea to periodically ask the students what would best serve them (lecture recaps, working through problems).

A problem may happen when students are feeling pretty confident after their last quiz or last exam, which of course is great, but may lead them to think they don't need to continue working as hard. I think a good way to ensure they realize that they have to keep studying hard is to make the sessions more interactive. In other words, have the lecture recap be primarily question-and-answer, where you bring up a topic and have them offer up their own explanations for salient points or concepts. If they find that they cannot do this because they haven't been staying on top of the material, this could serve as a wake-up call. What I also did during several sessions is we went over a non-textbook problem where each person did a different part of the question. After they finished writing up their explanations on the board, I asked them to switch with each other and try to explain the other person's work. This forces them to think on their feet and is a good way to see if they actually know the material in a comprehensive manner.

Another scenario is when your group is quieter. This poses a problem when doing the lecture recap since I like to ask short questions throughout and sometimes only one person would participate. However, to help with this, I have all of them come up to the board simultaneously to do a problem. In this way, everyone has to stay engaged and participate.

I hope these scenarios provide some insight on how you can adapt your teaching style. Ultimately, you are doing this for your students so be sure to ask their feedback and see what works best for them!

Adding Some Spice to Your Sessions

By Emma Anisman

The room is so silent that you are startled when one of your students' sniffles. You are counting in your head and you're almost to seven. Your students are so confused that only one thing remains clear – no one is going to answer your question. Don't worry, it happens to the best of us. But, there are some things you can do to prevent this situation, or at least help you get out of it. It will take practice and will require you to get to know how your group works best. In this essay I'll try to give you some strategies you can use to make your session your own.

Tip #1: The best way to find strategies to call your own is to steal them from someone else. Observation assignments are the perfect way to gain exposure to new warm-up ideas and hybrid strategies that you might not have thought of yourself or been exposed to elsewhere. Pay attention to how the leader runs the warm-up and asks probing questions. Here are a few warm-up strategies that I have witnessed:

- Each student must come up to the board and write something related to one of the week's topics. The group reassembles when everyone is done and then each person explains what they have written/drawn and anyone can ask questions.
- For quieter or less enthusiastic groups: A variation on this strategy where students are put in pairs and assigned to write information related to one of the topics.
- For more talkative groups: Quick round robin where each student says one thing related to each topic and you write them onto the board.

Hopefully these warm-up strategies will help create more productive sessions as your students will be primed with the equations and diagrams that are likely to appear on the rest of the packet.

Another takeaway from observations is the probing questions. If you can, try to observe a session before you have yours for the week. If the returning leader/mentor you observed uses some strategies or probing questions that you like, feel free to try them out on your students. Something that worked really well for another group may not work well for yours, so it can be a little experiment that helps you understand how best to help your group in particular.

Tip #2: You can be in control without being controlling. Usually, over time, your students will start to buy into the PLTL/Peer Mentoring philosophy, but until they do it is up to you to keep your cool and stand your ground. This doesn't mean that your sessions can't be fun, though. Here are some ideas that could help lighten up your sessions:

- Bring food, especially to the first few sessions. It will show your students that you care about them and want them to enjoy PLTL/Peer Mentoring.
- Take breaks. Some groups won't need a break, but 5 minutes of free time can go a long way for a group that is struggling with a tough packet.
- Play music. Quietly, of course, and something instrumental. My go-to was anything by Boards of Canada

These tips are great ways to keep your sessions dynamic, and your students will soon begin to see you as a leader/mentor not simply because they were assigned to your group, but because they trust you to guide them through the what might seem like very intimidating material in an unthreatening way. Ultimately your students will really start to enjoy PLTL/Peer Mentoring more once they realize you are role model for them. And, if they haven't already, it won't be long before they do.

Making Substitutions (And being the Substitution!!)

By Cara Jefferson

In cooking, when you don't have one ingredient, you can often opt to use another ingredient as a substitute. Similarly, as a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor, there may be weeks in which you cannot make your session and that is OK! There are only a few things that you need to do in order to make sure your students still have a quality session:

1. Send an email out to all the PLTL leaders/Peer Mentors ASAP! This is crucial because just as you are busy, so is everyone else. It may take time to find someone to fill in for you and you don't want to be caught without a sub last minute. I'd recommend asking at least 5 days in advance of your session.
2. Give your contact info to the leader/mentor that will serve as your substitute! Your sub may need to ask questions regarding the group dynamics of your students, how to find the room, etc. so it is important that they can get a hold of you.

Alternatively....

HOW TO BE A SUB???

Well, I imagine somebody just slices up a piece of bread and adds in whatever ingredients are desired. Ham. Turkey, bacon, lettuce...OHHH you meant a sub for PLTL/Peer Mentoring? Let's talk about that.

Subbing for PLTL/Peer Mentoring can be scary. You might ask: "How can I fill in for someone's group when I haven't even mastered leading my own group?" It is completely normal to be anxious or shy in regard to filling in for someone else. However, I encourage you to lean into the challenge. There are many benefits to substituting (being a sub) for another PLTL leader's/Peer Mentor's section. In addition to the finances (you do get paid for filling in!), you get more experience in leading your sessions, and in my opinion it is quite a lot of fun.

Here are some tips for leading a PLTL session as an alternate/sub:

1. Establish clear boundaries and be friendly! It is strange to have someone else in the room after weeks of becoming accustomed to a specific group. Students may be quieter because they don't know you. It is important to do ice-breakers at the beginning of your session to help lighten the mood! It is also important to be clear about how you expect to do things that session. Will you allow people to have phones? How will attendance work? These are all practices that differ from leader to leader/mentor to mentor and are important to consider heavily.
2. Don't be so hard on yourself. Unfortunately, it is entirely possible for you and the students to not vibe well during your session. It will be the only session you will have with them, so unlike your usual group of students you won't see them next week. DO NOT dwell on this and recognize that it's not personal if a group of students that don't know you seems quieter than your own PLTL/Peer Mentoring group.

3. Learn everyone's name and call on people by name! This is the easiest way for people to feel more comfortable with you.
4. Contact the person who's group you are filling in for, asking for details on group dynamics and try to prepare activities accordingly. Are there dominant students? Silent students? Are the desks left as is or typically arranged in a circle? This information will help you plan the logistics of what learning strategies to use and how to best facilitate the problem solving.
5. Follow up with the person you are filling in for to check in on who will enter student IDs into the Chem 111A/105 attendance kiosk and who will fill in the attendance excel sheet. Don't forget to put these hours on HRMS! Ask: Does the student expect to fill in for you in the future? It is important to talk through these to ensure the correct person (you!) gets compensated.

Both being a sub and asking for a sub are valuable experiences that I would highly recommend. Hopefully these tips help you in these situations!

Mixing the Perfect Blend of Flavors

By Kenny Peng

Congratulations on finishing your first few sessions! By now, you have probably familiarized yourself with the PLTL/Peer Mentoring facilitation strategies and have gotten to know many of your students and their personalities. While each student may shine individually in your PLTL group, it is important to develop and maintain a strong group dynamic amongst everyone, including yourself. Making sure everyone treats one another with respect and brings their thoughts to the discussion seems like a given, but it doesn't always happen without work from you, the leader/mentor.

One way to maintain group dynamics is to do small icebreakers before each session. I like to do a five to ten-minute round of rose, bud, thorn, which allows the students to recap their weeks and get more comfortable speaking to each other in the group. Since I had a pretty talkative group last semester, this also let the students get their need to socialize out of their systems and indicated that, afterwards, it was time to focus on chemistry. Other icebreakers such as highs and lows and M&M's/Skittles Q&A work equally as well. The way you approach these icebreakers sets the tone for the rest of the session: whether you want your group to be more laid-back or focused is totally up to you. In addition, if you find that your students are socializing too much while working on the packet, don't be afraid to take small breaks periodically throughout the session.

Another important way of developing group dynamics is to establish a form of communication outside of PLTL/Peer Mentoring. GroupMe, texting, e-mails, etc. allow your students to communicate and work with each other outside of formal PLTL/Peer Mentoring sessions. In addition, it serves as a great way for you to remind your students to show up to PLTL/Peer Mentoring and the topics being covered each week. To lighten the mood, you could also attach chemistry-related memes or gifs along with these messages.

Finally, make sure that everyone is engaged and positively contributing to the group. While this may seem hard, you have the whole semester to figure this out (and it's OK if you don't!). Some ways to do this are to use different learning strategies and talk to your students about topics other than chemistry. It's never too late to establish or remind students of group rules, which keep students accountable and encourage them to speak up.

Although these strategies may not work for your group in particular, remember that you know your group best. Identifying the strategy that your group responds to the most is the hardest part; after that, you can adjust it however you want. Try different methods, test things out, and be creative in tailoring your sessions to help your group maximize their success. Good luck!

Figuring out the Cook-Time

By Lucy Schlueter

Congratulations on leading your first session as a PLTL leader! Now that you're through the first session, it's time to start thinking about how to improve your sessions in the future. Over the course of my first semester as a PLTL leader, I really struggled with how much time to take on each section of the packet, so I decided to share what I've learned with all of you! In my session, I had a lot of very quiet students who didn't like to volunteer, so we would sit and wait during warm-up and during scribe problems for someone to begin speaking, which would take up a lot of our time. To get around this, I began trying to set a goal time for finishing the warm-up, which was usually between 25 and 35 minutes after the beginning of PLTL depending on how extensive the warm-up and the week's topics were. Sometimes we went over our set time, which was fine because finishing the packet isn't something you need to be fixated on as a PLTL leader, but it was nice for everyone involved to have set goals for the warm-up. Everything that follows really does depend on how familiar your group is with the material and what kind of problems are in what arrangement in the packet, but since the warm-up takes up about the first quarter of your session, depending on the group, the half-way point in the packet isn't necessarily reached until about an hour and 15 minutes after your session begins. So, don't be worried if your group isn't halfway through the packet by halfway through the session!

One nice thing I started implementing in my session pretty late in the semester was a 5-10-minute break at the hour mark. Keep in mind that your students have already been doing chemistry for an hour and it's a weekend. They might be tired and breaks are always fun. You can take an opportunity to get to know your students better and they get a chance to chat and use their phones, so neither of those things become a problem during the rest of the session. You can also play music and ask for their suggestions, or just play your own. My group wasn't particularly passionate about a specific type of music, so I would usually just play whatever I was just listening to, and everyone was fine with that. Some weeks your group might need a break, or they might not. If they want to keep pushing through for the full two hours, that's fine as well. It's up to them as a group to decide if they'd like to take a break. But, you, as a leader/mentor, can give them that choice. They might always need one, never want one, or fall somewhere in between, but it's always nice to have that option.

Throughout this essay, please keep in mind that it is much more important for your students to really understand in depth the material they're covering in the packet, rather than just speed through the entire packet, just so you can all get to the end. It is a satisfying feeling to finish the packet, but it's better for your students to truly and deeply understand the concepts than to just finish the packet. So, with that, feel free to keep some of this information on the backburner as you really begin to get a feel for how you want to lead your sessions. Each PLTL/Peer Mentoring session can be different, so it's important to keep your timing flexible to the length of the packet itself, the breadth of content covered, as well as your students' familiarity with it. So, all of this may depend on the week, but I wish you the best of luck leading all your future sessions and in figuring out your best cook-time!

Trusting the Recipe

By Kirsten Drabek

With the first couple sessions over with, it feels like you're getting into the groove of things. It is very easy to get comfortable with your group when everyone knows the drill of PLTL/Peer Mentoring. One of the most important things to remember at this time is to not become complacent with your PLTL/Peer Mentoring session. Every week there is an opportunity for improvement!

Sticking to the big guns is one of the best ways to stay on track! Being diligent in the ways to talk about growth mindset and phrases that enforce growth mindset is so important. Rather than encouraging students by saying "you're smart, you can do this" the language should change to, "the more you practice the better you will become". Watching what one says may be tedious, but it could mean the world to your students.

Another way to stay on track is to set goals with your group or set personal goals. Around PLTL packet 6, I took the first ten minutes to set goals for the rest of the semester with my group. This encourages students to be looking forward and shows that the work that is put in now will matter at the end of the semester. Qualifications for goals would include something that is measurable, achievable, and timely. Some examples of goals that my group came up with was to do 5 points better on the next exam and attend all lectures for the rest of the semester. Personal goals are important too. For my group, I had one student who did not like round-robin and would refuse to participate. I made a goal to get this student to at least feel comfortable to contribute a question during round-robin. The steps I contributed to this goal was to have a conversation with this student outside of class, re-establish the rules for round-robin in the big group, as in you can contribute a question, and to get to know this student more to establish trust.

Lastly, I tried to make each session interesting by breaking the monotony of the mid-semester slump. For example, I had one group that had trouble getting to know each other. So in different weeks we made a playlist to listen to, had a Domino's pizza party, made hot chocolate, and had a comfy clothes/pajama party. I felt like my students enjoyed something different every week, which provided an incentive to come. Also, these "outside" chemistry activities allowed my group to bond a lot, which created a more comfortable atmosphere. Also, doing activities does not have to break the bank: playing team building games or taking a break from the packet to keep the sessions interesting.

Trusting the recipe can be hard, especially being a leader/mentor who is extremely busy too. It seems hard to put in the work every week, but by the end of the semester, it's worth it. Building connections and getting to know my students on a personal level was one of the best things that came from being a part of this program. Best of luck for the rest of the semester!

After the First Course: Reflecting on the Session After the First Exam

By Sophia Xiao

Congratulations on becoming a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor! By now, you have been through several sessions, and your group has settled into a more comfortable vibe. You have a sense of the personalities of your students and are now working on adjusting your facilitation strategies to your group's needs. And now, your students have just taken their first exam. For the freshmen especially, the first exam can be surprising and a little disconcerting from what their exams were like in high school. But what can you do for the first session after the exam to help your students out a bit?

After the first exam, I liked starting the session off with an icebreaker to have them reflect a little. A personal favorite is Rose, Bud, Thorn in which students reflect on what has gone well in the past week, what hasn't gone so well, and what they are looking forward to for the next week. Granted, a lot of them will probably make the thorn the exam, but at the same time, they can think ahead toward going to dinner with friends or some other fun thing to treat themselves after the exam is over.

As a past PLTL leader described to us, if you decide to ask about how the exam went, it might be best to be careful so that students don't make others feel bad. For example, if I were to ask the students how the exam went and four of them said it was easy, the other students in the group might feel stressed or disheartened because they imagine that their peers did so much better. This could potentially set up an unhealthy group dynamic (or not, it really depends on your group!).

The session after the first exam is also a great chance to implement or continue the idea of the growth mindset. Remind your students that this is their first exam and that with the knowledge of how the first one felt and how much they prepared for it, they will be able to improve. The growth mindset is important for not only the students who struggling a little but also those who have a good understanding of the material. This viewpoint emphasizes a love of learning and most importantly, resilience! While it sounds cliché, success requires flexibility and persistence so challenge and should motivate them to spring forward and stretch themselves.

Even if a student is doing well academically in chemistry, you could remind them that this mindset will benefit them in other courses and throughout life as well.

With your group, you could also share your own experience with the first exam and what you did after the first exam. Talking about your time in Gen Chem also reminds the students that you were in their shoes last semester and if you made it through, so can they! If your students are really worried, you could briefly discuss what they thought they could do better for the next exam and what study methods they used. With different people contributing, sometimes students could pick up study tactics from their peers for the next exam. It might be important to emphasize that if a tactic did not work last time, maybe the student could switch it up and incorporate or hybridize methods.

Lastly, bringing food always makes a session so much better and your students will really appreciate it! The session after the first exam can be daunting, but just remember to remind your students of how hard they have worked so far and that they should be proud of themselves. Have a great first semester!

Don't Overcook Yourself

By Megha Prasad

I know you've heard this a lot by now, but seriously, congrats on being selected to be a PLTL leader/peer mentor! You should be so proud of yourself for getting this position out of the 700-800 people who take gen chem. You're probably at the point in the semester where everyone's classes and activities are in full swing. Right about now is when it starts to get hard, not only for your students, but for you as well. Generally, this is that time in the semester when everyone is pretty overwhelmed. You're probably feeling like "midterms season" will never end and all of your classes keep piling more and more on you every day. All of this is leading up to the infamous mid-semester slump. Though your students are also likely struggling with their busy schedules and you want to do your best to help them through it, you need to take time to make sure you're helping yourself too.

Balancing academic and extracurricular responsibilities can be really hard, especially when things start to pick up after freshman year. You're probably realizing that taking all of those credits and leadership positions in clubs really add up and don't leave you much time for yourself! The biggest thing I learned in my first year as a leader is that you can't help other people if you don't take care of yourself. Trust me, I've been there! Skipping meals, not getting enough sleep. It's easy to justify sacrificing your own health to volunteer at the hospital or tutor a friend, but in the long run you'll be able to do more for others if you are healthy. It's really important to make sure you have a little time for yourself every day. One way to do this while battling an impossible schedule is making sure that you set aside at least 20 minutes a day to do something you like. Whether that's going on a run, listening to music, or watching Netflix, a short break can make a world of difference.

I really want to emphasize that regardless of how defeated or tired you may feel right now; you are doing such a great job! You may not realize it, but your students really appreciate all the work you do to be there every week and help them out. Also, don't feel like you have to hide your struggles from your students to be a good role model. Your students are also caught in a flurry of midterms and are probably feeling the same way as you right now. Talking about these struggles can help you relate to your students, and you can give them advice on how you handle stress.

Finally, don't forget that the growth mindset philosophy that we preach to our students applies to you too! I can guarantee that you have already grown so much as a leader/mentor and even as a person this semester, and you should be proud of yourself for that. Try not to get too down over small bumps in the road, because you'll learn from these and continue to be the amazing people you all are! The semester will be over before you know it, so just push through and keep up the good work!

Adjusting the recipe

By Max Pernick

This time of the semester can be very taxing, both as a student and as a leader/mentor. From the students' perspective, they are in the middle of what is most likely the most difficult academic year in their lives. They have been working hard for a couple of months now and are desperately seeking the relief of Thanksgiving and Winter Break. This might translate to decreased attendance of your sessions, decreased focus during your sessions, or some of your students being behind in the material. Of course, one hopes that none of these are true, but the harsh reality is that this is present in at least some students. Not only are your students going through a tough time but being a first-time leader is difficult. As a leader/mentor, your classes are harder, you might be taking on responsibilities outside of the classroom, and you are also responsible for relearning an entire semester's worth of material as a PLTL leader/Peer mentor. New problems are arriving inside and outside of your PLTL/Peer Mentoring sessions and as a leader/mentor, it is your responsibility to adapt your style to best suit the current environment. Luckily, there is a multitude of strategies that you can use to effectively facilitate active learning in your sessions.

The great fact about learning strategies is just that: it is only a strategy. It is not set in stone and it can be adapted to best suit your environment. For example, if your students seem to be using their phones a lot during the sessions, you can implement a 5-10-minute break around the middle of your session. This will allow students to take a break and relax during a difficult problem set. As a leader/mentor, one of your best tools is observation. If you notice that your students are struggling with a particular type of problem, then it is important to change your style and avoid that particular style. During my sessions, I noticed my students were struggling with round-robin style problems. When I began to notice this, I changed all round-robin problems to utilize different problem-solving strategies, depending on the problem.

All in all, it is important to realize that you and your students are humans with limitations. As a leader/mentor, it is your job to do your best to circumvent these limitations by adapting your learning style! Good luck!

What to do when you burn the meal?

By Amanda Girardi

You're almost halfway through the semester of being a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor. You have probably already done several icebreakers to encourage a comfortable and inclusive environment during your sessions. After the first four or five sessions, you have stopped using icebreakers, which is expected because these activities provide a foundation for discussion. However, your students have probably had their first and even second chem exam at this point, and it seems that the dynamic of your sessions is going back to like it was during session one.

During my sessions, after the first three sessions I was so thrilled that my students talked about their week with each other as other students started to walk into the room, but after the first couple of midterms and the abundant amount of work piling up from other classes, my students began to revert to being somewhat quiet. Some of my students were not caught up on lectures or course content videos because of other upcoming exams. I also had a strong dominant student in my section that ignored the participation of other students, moved ahead in the packet, and interrupted students who were not as caught up with the material as he was. Not only did I have to revive the mood of my session due to the mid-semester slump and stress, but I also had to ensure that PLTL provided an environment that was comfortable and beneficial to their growth as chem students.

To help with the mood of my sessions, I designated about 10 minutes at the start of the session to go around and share any struggles or happy moments during the week. I saw that this improved the enthusiasm in my group as the session began because it allowed them to see what they have overcome in the past busy weeks and look forward to what was to come. These little discussions also allowed me to understand which recently learned topics were challenging for them that week.

As we started to dive into the packet, I tried to ensure that the positive momentum that was established at the beginning of the session was maintained throughout the sessions. I had a dominant student who posed challenges to both the other students and myself. I had to ensure that neither the group or I crumbled under the pressure of this dominant student. To keep everyone on the same track during the sessions, I liked to gain a grasp of the students' understanding by walking around the room during small groups. This is a great time to ask each group your probing questions. Answering probing questions helped students become comfortable participating in the presence of the dominant student because it gave them the opportunity to practice and share their new insights on the new concepts. It is also very important to read the body language of all your students as you walk around the room. If someone is on their phone and/or not participating in the problem solving, it is helpful to direct your questions towards them on a one-on-one basis. You might have to think of probing questions on the spot, which can be scary, but you'll get better at that with time. Then once you believe they have an understanding, you can encourage the group to listen to that person's thought process, which will not only instigate more discussion but provide confidence to the quiet student to participate.

This is your first semester being a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor and is understandable for both you and your students to become burnt out as midterms come along. Just like a new chef, it is reasonable to burn the first dish they make. However, just like a chef has the power to alter their cooking time for their next meal, you have the ability to change the mood of your future sessions.

Don't overcook your food

By Dylan Bodner

The session after the first exam can be super daunting, you never know how your students might feel about it. Based off of how your friends did from last year, you might be super worried that your students will come into your session super scared, or not come at all because they've lost all hope. After running through countless options of how you can address the situation, you will settle on one that you think is perfect.

I was on my way to my session and I ran through my plan and I knew exactly what I wanted to reinforce into my students. I started my session by discussing growth mindset and how improvement over time is more important than a strong score. I let them know that it was ok if they aren't happy with their score and that as of that session, only 10 points are actually in your grade. They seemed intrigued by this fact, but I wasn't reading any sort of relief. I kept talking about how this exam might be their first "real college exam" and that now they can use this experience to improve for future exams. I scanned over my students and read from their facial expressions that they were not too worried. I continued talking about what I had previously prepared, but I didn't feel like I was instilling the thoughts that I had initially planned. The looks of relief that I was expecting just weren't coming. I stopped and realize that I hadn't thought of the possibility that my students might be fine with the scores that they got.

The session after the first exam, it is super beneficial to read the room just before you start so that it is easier to cater. You can do an icebreaker where they don't talk about something academic and see how your students feel after the exam. If you see that one of your students just comes in happy, you can lead off an icebreaker where you ask them if they can talk about how they studied. You can get them to talk about what they found to be effective and what they would change about their study routine. If you feel that it is beneficial, you can open it up to the rest of the group and ask if other people are doing other things to study and asking if they find it effective. It is important to make sure that you don't value any specific type of studying and that you can talk about how different types of studying can be better for different people. It can also be risky to do this, because one of the students you choose can say that they didn't study, but by now it should be more apparent which student is putting more effort on their own to learn the material.

Now, this isn't to say that you should ignore your students that did not do as well as they expected. It is still important to reassure your students that are worried about their grade that it isn't the end of the world. A lot of students are probably not used to getting the score that they get on the first gen chem exam, so make sure that you are able to give some sort of emotional support to your students. Sharing your own experiences with how you got through gen chem and how your prep for exam might've changed. Being realistic with how you studied gives your students an idea of how a student has previously gone through gen chem and succeeded.

If you only focus on reassuring your students, it might make some of your students feel uncomfortable and like they can't be proud of their score. You can always just congratulate your students for taking their first gen chem exam. It is an accomplishment just to have finished their first exam in this class. Now that they have experienced the first exam, they know more of what to

expect and that even if they did well, there is still room to grow. Generally, talking about the growth mindset is still important, as it doesn't apply to just gen chem. Ultimately, it is important to apply the growth mindset discussion to all aspects of your students' life because all of your students can benefit from the thought processes that you get from growth mindset.

Adjusting the Recipe

By Sophie Scott

Woo hoo!! You're an awesome PLTL leader or peer mentor! Take a moment to reflect on how hard you've worked to get here and to pat yourself on the back for the great work you've done so far. You should be so proud of yourself. Being a peer leader/peer mentor isn't easy, and I'm here to remind you to take care of yourself throughout the process.

You're probably getting to a rough point in the semester. Yours and your students' stress levels are rising. You have a bunch of exams and it's getting harder to prioritize being on your A game at sessions. During this time, you may start to notice some students seeming disengaged or acting differently than normal. Your dominant students may become more quiet, previously really engaged students may start to be on their phone more often, some students may stop eating the snacks you're bringing or eating more than they used to. These are all really important signs that you need to watch out for in your students that can indicate higher stress levels in them or mental distress. It can be hard to know exactly what to say or do, but these are some general tips (provided by Jordan Worthington at Habif Health and Wellness Center):

1. Recognize the warning signs of a student in distress
 - a. Academic: dramatic drop in academic performance, missing sessions, inappropriate disruptions of the session
 - b. Physical/Psychological: visible, sudden increase or decrease in weight; obvious substance use; marked changes in concentration, motivation, or energy level; inappropriate or exaggerated behavior, such as aggressiveness, emotional outbursts, or crying
 - c. Others: direct statements indicating family problems or personal losses (death of a loved one, break-up, etc.) or just a general sense that something is seriously wrong
2. Express concern
 - a. Ask if you can talk to the student in private once the session is over. Be sure to listen in an open way to assess whether warning signs are present.
 - b. Explain your concerns and their basis, but don't make negative comments about character or personality.
 - i. DO say, "I've noticed that you haven't been yourself lately. Is everything all right?"
 - ii. DON'T say, "I've noticed you've been slacking off in session and not finishing the packets or understanding what's going on."
 - c. Tell the student your observations of their behavior and why they've led you to believe that talking with a counselor may be a good idea.
 - d. Avoid generalities. Comment on specific, observable behavior. At this point you can wait silently for a moment to see if the student offers a response.
3. Listen to the student

- a. It's not necessary for you to solve the student's problem. Just listen receptively and be your normal self as much as possible.
 - b. Listening can be a great form of support. Someone can walk away feeling that their concerns have been heard and understood.
4. Make a referral
- a. When to make a referral: you have seen warning signs listed above, you feel you have reached the limits of your ability to help, **a student expresses thoughts of suicide.**
 - b. Assure the student that seeking counseling is a sign of strength, share your knowledge of the referral source (be as specific as possible with information about how to access the service), start by just talking about going to ONE appointment versus "going to counseling", respect the student's right to reject the suggestion or think about it **unless there has been talk of suicide**
 - i. **If you have immediate concerns about a student's safety, stay with them and notify Habif at 314-935-6695.**
 - c. Commend the student for taking the first step
5. Resources
- a. These are **some** resources as of fall 2019, so be sure to do your own research and update/add to this list
 - b. Let's Talk: drop-in conversations with therapists around campus
 - c. On-campus counseling: make an appointment online through Habif
 - d. TAO: Therapist Assisted Online, skill building with or without a therapist
 - e. Group therapy: various groups, some drop-in, others closed
 - f. Off-campus counseling: see Habif Care Manager or wustl.rints.com for assistance finding an off-campus counselor

Checking in with students can lie on a spectrum based upon your level of concern for them. Sometimes a quick text just making sure they're doing okay and telling them that you're there if they need anything is sufficient. Other times, going through the process detailed above may be best. I know it can be hard or awkward, but at the end of the day our concern for each other as students and people is so important. If you see any warning signs, please check in. Another important resource you can always utilize is talking to Dr. Szteinberg, Dr. Daschbach, Dr. Bakupog, or Ms. Pottgen. They are here for whatever you need!

I sent a list of mental health resources in my GroupMe during this point in the semester, but you could do it over email as well. That way all students have access to it for themselves or a friend. Please use this as a reminder that accessing resources you need as a leader is important to. You matter, and I'm so glad you're here and that you're a leader. Keep being awesome!

FOOD COMA: The mass amount of work settling in our stomachs

By Hannah Bash

Congratulations on becoming a PLTL leader or Peer Mentor! Another congratulation for making it almost half way through the semester! By now I am confident that you have begun to master the recipe of how you run your sessions and perhaps started using different “ingredients.”

At this point in the semester it is common for the students to begin to feel extremely overwhelmed. Work piles up, and not just in chemistry, but in every other class as well. It is easy to get lost in the “food coma” that is the mess of all this work. It is possible that some of these students never experienced this kind of exam schedule in high school. Therefore, I recommend emphasizing to your students that they just need to take everything one step at a time. Prioritize and make study plans of how the work will get done. And this goes for the leaders as well.

Honestly, one of the best methods to connect with your students is to share your struggles with them. It is comforting for them to know that they are not the only ones who feel like they’re drowning as the middle of the semester hits. The mid semester slump is something everyone feels. Right now, you might be asking yourself why am I taking such a rigorous course load the same semester I decided to become a PLTL leader or peer mentor. I promise it will all be okay!! I know it feels like the head chef has truly turned up the heat on every single stove and some dishes may be burning, but you can always pick yourself back up. This is important to remind the students as well.

While I know hearing the word growth mindset might want to make you throw up the food you just ate, it really is a term that applies to everything we do in not just our academic lives, but our lives in general. The mid-semester slump is a great time to remind your students and yourselves of this concept. During this extremely stressful time, there may be one grade they are disappointed with, but that’s okay. Trust me from experience, you can’t make yourself go crazy about every grade. It is hard to conquer all of these exams and assignments, so ask for help when you need it.

Lastly, this might also be the time to ask yourself and your students if your current strategies are working for you. I am most definitely one to fall to superstitions and believe I have to study in the same spot for each exam, wear the same outfit, etc. However, maybe it is time to change things up. Find a new study spot, try a new study strategy, be confident in your abilities. One of the hardest things to do is recognize when our strategies aren’t working, but it’s important you emphasize to the students that they may need to tweak their study habits.

The mid semester slump is nothing to fear! Eventually all the work settles down and the stoves are put back on simmer, giving a nice break. While the food coma that is engulfing our stomachs and brains seems overwhelming, each assignment can be tackled and crossed off. Instead of fearing the heat, be ready to face it and conquer it!

Trust Yourself (and Your Students!) to Adjust the Recipe

By Jaclyn Liu

It's mid-semester, and by this time, you might be feeling more settled with your group and have a relatively reliable group dynamic. At this point, it's important to remember that it's not too late to implement the smaller changes you want to see— whether it's with group learning strategies, improving on an already solid or comfortable group dynamic, or starting to prompt your students to guide their own session. Recognizing positively that we have both room and the chance to keep improving is a way we can embody growth mindset as PLTL Leaders and Peer Mentors, and encouraging your students to help shape the sessions will help grow their own abilities to work productively in an independent group study setting.

The experience that prompted me to adjust the recipe with my group was noticing that putting students into small groups of 3-4 sometimes ended up with groups in which two students more familiar with the material put their heads together, working quickly and checking in with their groupmate only when prodded by me or when they were done. I was tentative to stray from the suggested group learning strategy at first too, but by now, you've had a good number of sessions under your belt and can trust yourself to adjust the recipe! I ended up switching to pairs instead of small groups much of the time. Although pairs has its own complications — some pairs you assign at the start might take much longer than others— it seems to add more pressure for dominant students to make sure their partners are on the same page, allows students to ask others questions more easily. This also helps the leader better identify where individual students are at in their understanding and what additional explanation from the group they might need. This is just an example of knowledge I gained from observing my students through sessions— trust yourself to adjust your own recipe according to the experience you've picked up!

One specific adjustment to the recipe I recommend at this point in the semester is to begin considering how to prompt your students, instead of directing them, to grow their abilities to make their own directives in a group study setting. Sometimes in my sessions, students would ask conceptual questions and I would get antsy when discussion became lengthy, knowing that working through more of the packet was also a priority. To respond to situations like these, we can consider transitioning from saying "let's give this discussion another minute or so" outright to saying something along the lines of "Let's keep in mind there are plenty of other concepts to get to today, so let's not get buried in the minutiae" instead to hopefully prompt a student to say "Okay everyone, let's keep moving and we can come back to this later". Prompting students to bring their thoughts up to the group and keep the session on track themselves will better equip them to work in their own groups when they grow past PLTL and peer mentoring as resources, and to also better focus on big picture concepts in Gen Chem and any other course of learning.

Some of the most satisfying developments I experienced as a PLTL leader this semester were in learning to be calm and trust my judgement while trouble-shooting in this setting with so many moving parts, and in developing a more peer-like rapport with my students (who *are* our peers!) by allowing them some more agency in how sessions proceed. I hope this advice benefits

your experience as well! Lastly, don't forget to take time to appreciate your own efforts and the growth you and your students all experience while working with the recipe of PLTL and peer mentoring!

More Than Just Veggies

By Mingyi Suo

Hi! This is almost the final stretch of the semester and I believe that you all have found your own style when guiding your students. You have known how to break down the problem and use the facilitating strategies to guide your students to solve these problems independently. Without any doubt, that is the main course of PLTL and Peer Mentoring and you may think that by the end of the semester, the veggies on the side are turning bland and just not important anymore. However, other aspects of PLTL and Peer Mentoring, including maintaining the group dynamics, student care and support outside of gen chem and self-care of the leaders, need to be consistently plated as well. These aspects are especially essential when we are reaching the final section of the semester when students and leaders all somewhat burnt out in their lives in WashU.

As we reach session #6 or #7, students have known about your facilitating strategies and style and adapted to the PLTL and Peer Mentoring philosophy. At the same time, the sense of novelty they felt in the beginning of the semester starts to fade as work piles up. The attendance may drop and students would only flood into the room five to ten minutes after you begin your session. You may also observe that less students would write things down in the packet and more of them become less vocal in the group discussions. Yes, they are tired and it's completely normal! It's the time for the leader to maintain the group dynamics for the final stretch of the semester. I think one strategy that worked well for me was to be consistent in talking about things outside of gen chem. My students usually enjoyed venting before we jumped into the problems and our PLTL sessions became a place for them to talk about other aspects of their lives. When I led my first PLTL group, I was getting trained for Student Tour Leaders (WashU's tour guides) so I would always include one of the WashU fun facts in my session. Also, you may also try to adjust the facilitating strategy by asking how they would like to proceed. For example, if I saw that a lot of my students were really quiet in pairs/groups and looked confused, I would ask them whether doing the problem together as a big group while me scribing on the board would be more effective and direct for them. Even after the semester is over, you may also email them to show your support when they prepare for their first final! Tell them that they can always reach out and meet you in person if they have any questions or concerns before the final.

You, as a leader, also need support at this point of the semester. For me, I heard about a lot of stories and issues from other peer leaders and mentors. I would be really impressed by how other leaders came up with their unique facilitating strategies and sometimes, it was hard for me not to reflect on how some strategies may not work well with my group by the end of the semester. It could be a bit stressful when you tried different methods with your group and the outcome was not ideal. It's normal to have these feelings because you really want to make the environment comfortable and effective for all your students so that they would be ready for genchem and all other challenges. We, as leaders/mentors, also need to remind ourselves about growth mindset. This is your first time leading students and you should always encourage yourself that you would be more confident in your own facilitating style in the future as you improve.

I hope these tips would help you and your students finish strong in this semester! :)

Oh No! The dish got burnt! How do we fix it?

By Arjan Kalra

Hello there! I think it is important before getting started, especially with a topic that is often as nerve-racking as this one, to say that you are most definitely deserving of your position as a PLTL Leader or Peer Mentor. I know that it is something that is overstated (as I'm sure it's in nearly every essay in the book), but that doesn't mean it isn't important to give yourself a pat-on-the-back for a job well done!

As you have probably already gathered, being a PLTL Leader or Peer Mentor isn't easy. The normal stress of keeping a group of students composed and focused on what may not always be the most interesting material is coupled with the pressure of imposter syndrome that many students at WashU resonate with, especially as things start going poorly.

From personal experience, I can assure you that this pressure is compounded as your group gets smaller and smaller. The dish that we were preparing all semester seems to have burnt, and now we have less of the dish than we originally had. It's easy to think that it is your fault somehow, or that you are a bad PLTL Leader or Peer Mentor (or chef if you are still keeping up with the analogy).

But that simply isn't the truth. You need to remember that you are doing great and it's all about putting in work to constantly improve yourself and adapt to the circumstances you are facing. So that begs the question: How do you deal with a group that gets smaller and smaller towards the end of the semester? How do you fix a dish even after the cooking is done? Well, it's all about three key traits you must master on.

First, you need to master the art of adaptability. Any good chef knows that not everything will always go perfectly and that is up to you to be ready to adapt to any situation that may confront you. Often times, you will be told how students should be solving a problem when the group size is large, which may not be applicable to your smaller group. In times like these, the art of adaptability can save the day. It is best to recognize the dynamics that occur within your group and consider the essence of each problem solving strategy (for example, if the problem is scribe, is there any other problem solving strategy that could apply the same type of problem solving skills that your students could use?).

Second, you need to master the art of relationship-building. Often times, a PLTL Leader or Peer Mentor is viewed differently based on how close they are to their students. This trait is especially paramount when your group is small and that much more dependent on a great group dynamic. There are a variety of ways in which you can get closer with your group. Bringing food to your sessions, taking occasional breaks and putting on music, or going around in a circle and asking everyone to talk about the most interesting parts of their weeks are all great ways to develop a closer bond with the students in your group.

Third, you need to master the art of confidence. Something that can commonly happen with leaders whose group size dwindles is that they can start to think that it is due to their incompetence. This feeling can seep into how you work with your group, and even other parts of

your life. It is important to be confident that you are capable of doing a great job in this position, even if it seems like the results aren't saying that. A saying that Dr. Daschbach and Dr. Szteinberg say often has been really integral to helping me regain my confidence, and the main gist of it is that you were chosen through an *extremely* selective application process: the fact that you are a PLTL Leader/Peer Mentor now is proof enough that you are capable of being an amazing facilitator and mentor. Even the best chefs fail: the important thing isn't that you do the job perfectly, it is that when it goes wrong, you adapt properly and learn from it!

PLTL and Peer Mentoring is eventually bound to be imperfect (just like cooking?). It's important to realize that it's ok that things can go poorly; just make sure to also be ready to put in the work necessary to recover and react properly! I hope the rest of your PLTL/Peer Mentoring sessions go well throughout the semester and that you have a great end to your 1st semester as a PLTL Leader/Peer Mentor!

If It Isn't a Five Star Review, Don't Panic

By Hannah Johnston

Hi newish peer leader/peer mentor (It's been almost a full semester now, right?)! I hope your semester has been going well and your group has been fabulous. Right about now, you'll get your first reviews from your students. This can seem very daunting or very exciting. You're hoping that your students say something nice and maybe worried that if they say something bad, it means you're not doing a good job. Maybe you're then worried that because of the bad review that you're not the right fit for peer leading or that the bad reviews will reflect a bad performance to Dr. Daschbach, Dr. Szteinberg, and everyone else. Know this, You DO NOT need to be worried.

If you get only good reviews congratulations! However, more likely than not, not all of your students will say you're doing everything perfectly. If you get a bad review, keep five things in mind.

1. You were chosen to be a leader/mentor by people who know what they're doing.
2. This is not a call out, but a chance to improve.
3. You don't know the students' mindset.
4. You're a brand new peer leader/peer mentor
5. Keep the review in context

To go into more depth on those five points:

You were chosen to be a leader/mentor by people who know what they're doing. This review does not define you, and getting a bad review doesn't mean you're a bad peer leader/mentor. Maybe you think that this isn't the right place for you, but I promise it is. You were hand selected by people who have been running this program for years. If you don't trust yourself, trust them. They know what they're doing, and they didn't make a mistake in choosing you.

This is not a call out, but a chance to improve. Think of any negative feedback as areas of improvement. Hearing you have things to work on isn't the end of the world, in fact, it's an opportunity. Any criticism they give you can be taken to heart and used to improve as a leader.

You don't know the students' mindset. You have no idea what was going on in the student's life when they wrote this review. Maybe they had just done poorly on a Chemistry quiz and temporary felt negative emotions towards the PLTL/Peer Mentoring program and chemistry in general. I'm not saying to discount any advice a student gives you. It is likely, the students are being honest and helpful, but keep in mind that reviews can be relative, especially if it's a really bad review.

You are brand new at peer leading. You shouldn't expect yourself to be perfect. No one else expects perfection of you. Peer leading, like anything else, is a learning process. All anyone expects of you is that you try your best and work to become the best peer leader you can be. Don't stress if you don't have it down to a science yet, even the most experienced peer leaders/mentors are working on becoming better facilitators. Keep the review in context. This is one student on one day. This one moment doesn't define your entire semester as a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor much less your career as one. Furthermore, what you may have considered

a negative review is really an almost entirely positive review with one comment that could be interpreted negatively. Try not to hone in on the negative so much that you don't get to celebrate your successes.

Hopefully, this advice helps! Here's to hoping, your reviews are all good, your semester ends well, and you have a nice winter break!

Perfecting the Signature Dish

By Ethan Lowder

Congratulations on being selected as a PLTL leader or peer mentor! In your PLTL session, group dynamics have likely shaken out and became more normal. By now, you probably feel more comfortable as a leader/mentor, and even have started to learn more about what PLTL/Peer Mentoring means to you. This essay is about perfecting your signature dish, that is perfecting your PLTL/Peer Mentoring session. There are three ways I have learned to do this, improving your strengths, learning your weaknesses, acknowledging growth mindset within yourself.

Every PLTL leader/Peer Mentor has their own strengths, throughout my session I learned that mine was facilitating small groups. Recognizing your own strengths can be done in many different ways. You can see which strategies help your students feel most confident, which are most liked, and or ask students which ones are the most effective. Consultation with the peer leaders/peer mentors who observe you can also help you figure out your strengths. Realizing your own strengths is extremely powerful as a peer leader. It can help you to know what strategies to use on hard problems. Growing and improving traits that are already strong can help you to perfect your signature dish.

Even the best chefs have areas of cooking they can work on. An important part of perfecting the signature dish is to realize your weaknesses. As a peer leader, recognizing my weaknesses was especially challenging to me. However, I learned a great way to identify them. Just like chefs learn under other chefs, PLTL leaders/Peer mentors learn under other leaders/mentors. One way to recognize your weaknesses is to ask a leader/mentor who you know personally to observe you for their observation assignment. This not only allows for feedback through the observation assignment but also feedback during PAM. I also believe that working with the PAM instructors on how to best run your session is helpful. Finally, asking your students what they feel is your weakest trait midway through the semester can be essential. Once your weaknesses are identified, you should work to improve them. As leaders/mentors, we are always improving and recognizing your weaknesses can put you on the way to crafting the perfect gift.

The last part of perfecting the signature dish is realizing that you won't get it right every time. Not every session goes perfectly, and even the best leaders/mentors have off days sometimes. Remember to bring the growth mindset you spoke of in PLTL/Peer Mentoring into your own lives. Know that being a PLTL leader/Peer Mentor isn't about being perfect but trying and learning from your mistakes. As the semester goes you will learn so much as a leader/mentor, and growth mindset will help you be the best leader/mentor you can be.

Once again, I am so thrilled to have you join in the PLTL/peer mentor community. Know that perfecting a signature dish doesn't come in one, two, or even 10 sessions. Over time, however, you can learn from what you struggle with, learn what you're strong with, and perfect your signature dish.

Solidifying Group Dynamics

By Kyra Rosen

Welcome to the final stretch! By now, you're probably feeling pretty confident in your ability to lead/mentor. You've had some road bumps, and hopefully have made some happy memories with your group. You have a better grasp of each member's personality and maybe have found a way to use that information to create an event more productive and smoothly running group. Take a second to pat yourself on the back – you've been a leader/mentor for almost an entire semester! Think about how far you've come in that short time.

While you should definitely celebrate yourself and your group at this point, it's also important to finish strong. The end of the semester can be full of conflicting emotions – stress, relief, lethargy, pride. All of your members could internalize these in different ways, and it's important that you stay dynamic and ready to adapt to any changes that might happen. Pairs of members that may have worked before might begin having issues, small group dynamics may fade, your dominant students may fall quiet or your quiet students might get loud.

In my experience, some of my dominant students stopped coming to group later in the semester as they gained confidence in the course. This totally flipped the dynamic of my last few sessions – new students became the dominant ones, others grew quieter. I found it helpful to emphasize large group dynamics at this point – one thing every member has in common is your group! This ended up looking like a bunch of small groups that all talked to one another across the room. While this may not be ideal, and might not work for your group, I think it bred a certain type of unity among my members and helped us push through those last few packets.

You'll have to find what works best for you, but whatever you decide, stay flexible and open to new ideas! It's so easy to get jaded and set in your ways at this point, but you've all proved how creative and dynamic you can be. These last few sessions will set the final tone of your group – if you enjoy them and give them your all, your members will too. Good luck!

Enjoy the Last Bite

By Urmi Mange

Look at how far you've come! You went from doing the mis-en-place to creating a dish you should be proud of! The semester can fly by quick and it is very important to take a moment to pause and breathe it all in. Your first last PLTL/Peer Mentoring session won't come by twice.

It might have happened that by now group attendance in your sessions has significantly dropped and that's okay. You can take advantage of the smaller group size to really come to know the students you are working with. For your last ever session, you could spend some time to talk about the growth mindset, how proud you are of how far your group has come and share some study strategies. All of this can feel more intimate in a smaller group and you can use that to your advantage.

Although the students will still have two more weeks of lecture material to go at your last session, it is important to end on a high note to leave a sweeter taste in their mouth. You could bring by some snacks, maybe some cake, or ask your students if they would like to bring something.

The final session is also a very stressful time not only for your group but also for yourself. The semester is going to come rushing to an end, so it's important that you make some time for self-care activities. Take a second to give yourself a pat on the back for being a first-time leader/mentor. You have embodied the growth mindset, and improved throughout the year. Taking a moment to reflect on that can be calming and give you some closure on a very busy semester.

Cooking requires time, preparation, patience, care and thoughtfulness, just like peer leading/peer mentoring. Like any good chef, once you've placed the garnish and drizzled over the sauce, don't forget to taste the fruits of your labor and savor the last bite. You deserve it.

Bringing Group Back Together to Remember PLTL Philosophy: How to make a comeback if your dish isn't perfect

By Nisha Hawkins

You are in the final few sessions of PLTL/Peer Mentoring for the semester, and I'm sure the semester has flown by! I don't doubt that you will miss your group, and I'm sure at this point that you can recognize their immense growth throughout the semester and increased self-confidence as chemistry students. However, you may have also noticed that some of your students have become overly confident in your sessions as well, and they may have even begun to deviate from the PLTL/Peer Mentoring philosophy a bit. This is normal, and there are many ways you can bring your group back together to ensure that the last few sessions go as smoothly as possible. This material is super important for their future chemistry classes, so it is vital that they are taking away as much as possible from their PLTL/Peer Mentoring sessions.

When my group started to get a bit off track in their sessions, I was slightly overwhelmed, but I learned that it is not difficult to fix. At the same time as recognizing the problem, I was excited that they had created such a strong bond among themselves. One way to help them stay on track is to use their bond to refocus them. I realized that a lot of my students were frustrated with how we didn't finish the packets, so I would remind them during our sessions that if they stop side conversations, we could finish the packet more quickly as a group. A simple reminder like this helped them realize that they should stay on track. Another problem I encountered was students working ahead, especially towards the end of the semester or the sessions right before an exam. When students work ahead, the dynamic of the group is really impacted in a negative way, because the students who worked ahead would dominate the problem to get through it more quickly. One way you can fix this issue is just to remind the students of the PLTL/Peer Mentoring philosophy at the beginning of the session. This will most likely stop them from working ahead, help them realize the importance of arriving on time, and stop them from using their phones if phones have become an issue.

One way that I helped my group come back together and follow the PLTL/Peer Mentoring philosophy throughout the semester was by using hybrid strategies. After the first couple of sessions, all the students knew the problem-solving strategies and had developed their own opinions about them. Every time we got to round robin, they would sigh and complain, and end up not really following the strategy. Or, when we would do scribe, one person would dominate the entire problem. At one of the last few sessions, I announced that we were going to do a combination of the round robin and scribe strategies, and I could tell that my group was intrigued. They actually followed this strategy better than they had followed each one individually and had fun coming up with silly names for it. A great way that you can keep your group interested is by coming up with new things to do in each session. It is easy for the students to get bored with doing the same thing each week, so combining two strategies is a great way to prevent this. Additionally, you can switch things up each week by doing a fun icebreaker in the beginning 10 minutes. I didn't do full icebreakers, but I would ask the students for their favorite movie, TV show, or ice cream

flavor at the beginning of each session so that they had something else to relate about. This really seemed to work well as far as keeping the students interested every week.

Overall, you are doing a great job! As the semester comes to an end and you realize you are going to miss your students, know that your students feel the same way; they are going to miss their first chemistry PLTL leader/Peer Mentor. Cherish your last few sessions with your group and try to have fun with them! Soon it will be time to take on the challenge of working with and perfecting strategies for another amazing group of chemistry students.