

Language Peer Tutoring: Starting from Zero

Elizabeth Dolly Arvai Weber, Ariana Antonelli, Lisa James

University of Illinois at Chicago

Abstract

In August 2018, I started a peer tutoring program for French, German, Italian, and Spanish students. Advanced students take a one-semester apprenticeship class with me; after this, they are eligible to be an intern-tutor or paid peer tutor for basic language students. In this presentation, which I hope will also be a discussion, I lay out my goals and outcomes in creating this new language peer tutoring program, and outline steps towards setting up or enhancing language peer tutoring programs at other institutions. I see this as an urgent need, as few language peer tutoring programs exist, and the very importance of language teaching is coming increasingly into question. Peer tutoring programs have been shown to help with student success, retention, and timely graduation, so it's crucial that we offer language students the same level of support already given to writing and math and science students. As a large public university, where more than 60% of incoming freshmen are the first in their family to go to college, UIC has long supported peer tutoring—in Math and Science and in Writing only. UIC is also committed to diversity, and our student body is wonderfully multilingual and multicultural. However, this diversity is not yet reflected in the instructors for the French, German, Italian, and Spanish departments. The first goals in creating the language peer tutoring program were to offer peer role models for students in the basic language classes, and to provide professional development training for the peer tutors themselves. Two of my many collaborators in this process (undergrads who helped shape the initial program, graduate students who work with me to scaffold the administrative side of the program) will present with me: Ariana Antonelli, undergraduate (Italian), Lisa James, doctoral student (Hispanic literature). Our website: <https://lclc.uic.edu/peer-tutoring/>