

# SPRING 2012 BULLETIN



## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Greetings! As the spring semester starts, we are already thinking about next fall and building upon the growth we saw in academic coaching, tutoring and study group utilization last semester. In a few weeks, we will start the process of recruiting peer tutors and study group leaders for 2012–2013.

It should not come as a surprise that I am a huge proponent of the peer tutor model. When the model works as designed, with carefully selected and trained tutors engaging their peers in discussions about course content and the most effective study strategies, there is a synergy of learning that one can feel radiating from the room.

Hillary Ornberg explains in her article, “Tips of the Trade,” how we prepare and develop our student employees as peer educators and leaders. It all starts with recruiting strong candidates, and that’s why we need and regularly ask for faculty help. As faculty, you know who has the promise to be a strong tutor or study group leader and you can help steer them in our direction. When you do, we all benefit.

There are many reasons to encourage students to work in the BLC, as tutor Bob Lively illustrates in our Scholar Profile. For example, our student staff obtain tremendous experience listening to others’ questions, deciphering what really needs to be addressed, explaining information in a variety of ways, and making sure that others understand. They gain a stronger foundation in their discipline and develop many valuable communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills that will transfer to whatever career they choose.

As we move into the second half of the year, please be on the lookout for students who might be good tutors and study group leaders. We welcome your suggestions at any time and will be asking for your input soon.

We look forward to working with you again this semester to support students’ learning. I hope you enjoy this spring version of our newsletter and extend my best wishes for a successful semester.

*Michael Dickinson*

## IMPORTANT DATES

*Monday 1/23*  
NESAD Tutoring Begins

*Wednesday 1/25*  
Tutoring and Study  
Groups Begin

*Wednesday 2/22*  
Early Alert Deadline

*Thursday 4/26*  
iStudy Event

## WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

Contact us at:  
617.573.8235  
blc@suffolk.edu  
or stop by Donahue 208

 [facebook.com/suffolkballotti](https://www.facebook.com/suffolkballotti)

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BLC student employees  
learn networking skills  
at all-staff training

## SEEING THE FOREST THROUGH THE TREES: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE UNIVERSITY ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM'S SU 101 CURRICULUM



Academics, personal growth, and successful transition! Oh my! The mix of topics in the UAP SU101 curriculum, including what is college, time management, foundations of learning, academic advising, financial planning, academic

honesty, alcohol use, and balancing it all, may leave students thinking they are learning something about everything but nothing in particular. Simultaneously, instructors may find themselves asking “am I really teaching my students anything?” In an effort to help UAP students “see the forest through the trees” during their first semester, the BLC programs team made a conscious effort during the fall 2011 semester to focus on intensive academic preparation in SU101 while addressing transitional topics beyond the classroom in miniature seminars. BLC staff members, graduate fellows, and study group leaders worked together to produce eight 60-minute sessions. The first seminar series focused on alcohol; the second explored financial planning.

During the alcohol seminar, students learned the history of alcohol through a competitive game of trivia. We also welcomed Professor Dewar from the Biology Department and the Suffolk University Peer Education group (SUPERS) from the Health and Wellness Office to speak on alcohol policies and the physiological impact of alcohol use. The seminar concluded with the students developing compelling arguments on the current legal drinking age in America.

The financial planning seminar focused on consumerism, debt management, saving, and investing. Students were exposed to an experiential activity called the Whole Life Market. During this activity, students were given starting salaries for their future professions and asked to shop for their ideal lifestyle. Through the Whole Life Market, students learned the difference between gross, adjusted gross and net incomes. Afterward, they developed personal budgets based on their future earnings and anticipated lifestyles.



A seminar student shops at the Whole Life Market during an experiential learning activity

# “Definitely a very timely topic.”

*An attendee's reaction to “Teach Something, Not Everything” conference presentation.*

The seminars addressed two major transitional topics beyond a 75-minute SU101 class, which created opportunities for students to delve deeper into a specific topic, generate discussions, apply methods of critical thinking, and learn from hands-on experience. In addition, this change allotted more time in the SU101 classroom to create a cohesive curriculum for students specifically based on the academic skills needed during their first semester at college. On November 14, my colleague Greg Freed and I highlighted these changes in “Teach Something, Not Everything: Rescoping the First-Year Experience Curriculum” at NASPA's Region I conference in Sturbridge, MA. The presentation was well received by the attendees and we hope to continue with additional seminars complementing SU102 during the spring semester.

*Courtney Hytinen*



Academic coaches Courtney Hytinen and Laureen Simonetti educate students on learning styles

## ACADEMIC COACHES CONNECT STUDENTS TO SUFFOLK SUPPORT



The continued growth of academic coaching at the University confirms that students benefit from having somebody they trust to sit down with and plan an overview of their days, weeks and months ahead.

The overriding goal of coaching is for students to feel both individually empowered and connected to the institution. It's our belief that when students feel valued and understand that others are invested in their personal success, many of them strive to perform better, and, more importantly, invest in themselves.

So how does academic coaching encourage this outcome? Coaches often connect the dots for students by explaining the steps needed to continue their growth at Suffolk. Academic coaching itself is a central station within the student support map, and we encourage students to view Suffolk as their own academic support network. Referrals create connections within this network. Last year academic coaches met with 628 students who received 2151 referrals, the highest percentage of which was to professors.

In order to demonstrate how academic coaches support and refer students, we can follow the progress of a sophomore student, "Anna." This semester, Anna returned with an incomplete grade from the spring. During her first meeting with a coach in week two, Anna was referred to the professor who had assigned the incomplete grade, and she and her coach subsequently set out an academic plan for the semester. This allowed Anna to comprehend what needed to take place to address the grade, and tutoring appointments were arranged at the Writing Center. During week six, the coach explained the Early Alert process, not assuming Anna knew what was taking place. Although she received no alerts, Anna was referred to her professors to check on her performance in her classes. During the following week's coaching appointment, Anna was reminded to schedule an advising appointment.

Anna has started to demonstrate an enjoyment of her classes and has taken great heart from her successes this semester. This was the first semester that she didn't receive an early alert, and her incomplete grade has now been replaced by a B. She understands that this has not only helped her GPA, but has also ensured her class completion rate is higher. She has said that she understands what she needs to do in continuing to build upon her successes. Rather than plotting a route to avoid Suffolk's support services, Anna now actively seeks them in order to improve her academic progress. The BLC academic coaches are here to help students like Anna stay connected and take control of their academic futures.

*Jason Knowles*

**“My academic coach is very easy to talk to and I always feel like she cares about my success.”**

*A student on coaching*



Bob Lively represents the BLC at the Temple Street Fair

## BLC SCHOLAR PROFILE: ROBERT LIVELY

Bob is one of our star student staff members here at the BLC. He started at the front desk as a central referral receptionist, and we were so impressed with his industrious work ethic and engaging personality that we asked him to be a tutor and a BLC scholar in his sophomore year. This year he serves as a tutor mentor, leading supports and acting as a resource for his fellow tutors. As a scholar, Bob will also present at the BLC's Second Annual Conference.

### *What made you decide to work at the BLC?*

When I was in high school, I was a math tutor for younger students, and I really enjoyed it, so I knew that I wanted to continue tutoring in college. However, as a freshman, I hadn't taken any courses yet, so I started at the front desk until I acquired enough coursework to feel comfortable tutoring.

### *Describe one of your most memorable moments at the BLC.*

One of my most memorable moments was my first iStudy, where I had my first tutoring experience with the BLC. I was asked to fill a spot for STATS 250, which is one of my strongest subjects, so I agreed. The whole atmosphere of iStudy was amazing. I thought that I would be a little overwhelmed at first, but after students started coming in and asking questions, I realized that this wasn't as bad as I thought. I had equations written on the board I was given, I was helping students individually, and if I had another person at the STATS table with me, we would each work with a small group of students. Overall, it was a great experience and one that I will always remember.

### *What do you like the most about your work at the BLC?*

What I like most about working here are the people who I work with. I enjoy coming to work every day and seeing everyone. I always joke around with people and tell them that I'm either in class or at the BLC. I spend a lot of time here because I'm comfortable here.

### *What is your favorite subject to tutor and why?*

My favorite subject to tutor is probably accounting. I had a great professor—Professor Whalen—for both ACCT 201 and 202, so I learned a lot from him. I use the concepts and the examples that he would use for my class in my tutoring sessions. If I have a student who has the same professor I had, then they know what I'm talking about and it reinforces what they already know. The greatest part though is when I have a student who didn't have the same professor and I can show them a new approach to the same problem.

### *As a management major, how do you feel your work at the BLC has contributed to your career interests?*

Working at the BLC has made me more confident communicating with my peers, which is going to be a huge part of my career. Also, by taking on more of a leadership role here, I have been introduced to the balancing act that is managing people while accomplishing tasks that are required of me.

### *What are you doing for the BLC Conference?*

This will be my second time presenting at the conference. This year I am working with a fantastic team of fellow scholars and our topic is "Engaging the Quiet Student." While most people I work with would tend to disagree, I am a quiet student. I am not the first person to raise my hand in class and answer a question. I am still paying attention, but I'm not as vocal as other students, so this topic really speaks to me.

### *What do you wish the campus community, especially the faculty, knew about the BLC?*

I wish that other students knew that the BLC has other services besides tutoring. As for the faculty, I wish they knew that at the BLC, we have some of the best students on campus. While I know that I may sound a little biased, the fact is that all of our tutors and study group leaders are not only intelligent, but also well-rounded individuals.

## TIPS OF THE TRADE: TUTORS AND STUDY GROUP LEADERS BUILD VALUABLE SKILL SETS



Did you know that the BLC's tutors and study group leaders use their knowledge of neuroscience to help students with challenging course content? Did you know that they facilitate sessions using the Socratic method? Did you

know that if any of our tutors or leaders were contestants on the Pyramid game show, they would take home the big bucks? Well, they absolutely do and they definitely would!

Believe it or not, neuroscience, the Socratic method and Pyramid have much in common with tutoring and leading study groups. In order for our staff to adequately plan for and facilitate their sessions with students, they need to understand how the human brain learns, retains and retrieves information. Our tutors and leaders continually aim to engage students in a variety of ways in order to maximize the comprehension and recall of complex course content. One of several techniques we train our staff to use with students is the Socratic method, which fosters critical discussion, problem solving, and deep comprehension, creating the kind of cognitive engagement that cultivates optimal learning. In addition, Pyramid, a game in which students guess phrases written within tiers of a pyramid, allows our staff to practice describing concepts creatively to their teammates who guess based solely on the clues provided by their team. This exercise develops their communication skills, reminding them that even though something might be clear to them, it might be challenging to grasp for others.

Thus, we aim to offer our student staff extensive training and opportunities for leadership development as we strive to provide outstanding academic support to students seeking our services. We select students to join our staff who not only have a GPA above 3.3 in their major, have earned an 'A' in the courses for which they wish to provide service and have been endorsed by Suffolk faculty members, but who also have good instincts about how students learn. These are students of integrity who already know that just giving their peers the answers will not help them learn the material.



Greg Freed and Hillary Ornberg deliver closing remarks at all-staff training

**I get great experience and skills for how to talk with students and encourage them to study more.**

*A tutor on the BLC's training program*

Once we've selected our staff members, they participate in our training program, which is a recipient of the International Tutor Training Program Certification by the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). Our curriculum consists of a full-day training prior to the start of each semester, weekly support meetings throughout each semester, and monthly all-employee meetings. During the pre-semester training we cover everything from academic honesty to the neuroscience of learning. In our weekly support meetings, the tutors and leaders congregate in small, designated groups and we reinforce the skills learned at the pre-semester training through activities, workshops and discussion. At all-employee meetings we often invite guest speakers including faculty members from a variety of disciplines or administrators from other offices such as Diversity Services to speak to our entire staff about how they can support all Suffolk students.

While we do not expect our student staff to be experts nor to know the answer to every question they are asked, we do train them to be resourceful and creative in demonstrating to students how to figure out what they need to know. Our study group leaders and tutors are all high-achieving, personable and reflective students who are enthusiastic about assisting their peers to learn effectively.

*Hillary Ornberg*