Peer Research Advisers: Training the Next Generation of Business Researchers

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What is your favorite thing about student workers?

Write your response in the chat, but DON’T hit enter yet.

Agenda

01

Background

Brief context around COB300 & the PRA program

02

PRA Training

How we work as a team

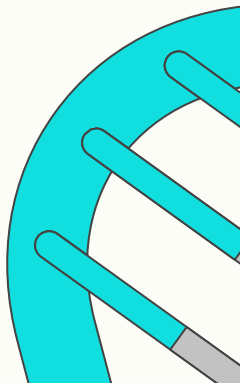
Acronyms to Note:

PRA for **P**eer **R**esearch **A**dvisers

COB for **C**ollege **o**f **B**usiness

The COB 300 course experience

- 12-credit integrative course
  - Students take foundation courses in finance, management, marketing & operations
  - 20% of final grade in each course comes from business plan project that integrates the 4 disciplines
- Required of nearly all business majors
  - Fall semesters: 450+ students in 6 sections
  - Spring semesters: 180+ students in 2 sections
- First time they do “business research”

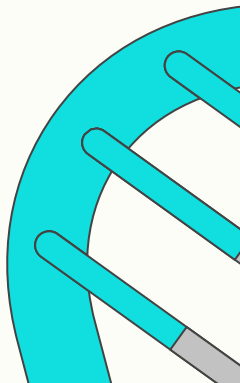


Why create a Peer Research Adviser program?

- COB 300 students accounted for 230 questions 2016-17 – 15% of library's total logged reference questions
- Possible solutions:
  - Asynchronous instruction couldn't be scaled successfully because each team was researching a different idea
  - No longer had a reference desk to share burden
  - Hiring or reallocating faculty or staff was deemed unnecessary
  - Past librarian had piloted a student assistant position. Revive?

Why create a Peer Research Adviser program?

- Started in 2017-18 with one peer research adviser (Cohort 1)
- Each year since, we've hired between 2-3 PRAs
- Benefits
  - PRAs handle two-thirds of COB 300 consultations annually
  - Help maintain an array of instructional materials
  - Understand how student's experience is evolving



What do Peer Research Advisers do?

- Learn about reference interviews and business information
- Visit COB 300 sections to briefly pitch library support
- Meet with teams (6-8 students each)
  - Undertake preliminary research based on appointment request
  - Send follow-up email with strategies
  - Answer subsequent questions via email as needed
- Offer drop-in hours before the business plan draft is due
- Tackle projects to support business research

How to recruit Peer Research Advisers?

- Employment period is 3 semesters over 18 months
  - Train as second-semester juniors and work as PRAs during senior year.
  - This means we hire and train every academic year!
- Recruiting students to apply
  - Ask the professors for recommendations
  - Send current PRAs to class for 2-3 minutes to pitch the position
- Application process
  - Submit cover letter and resume through survey
  - Invite 3-5 candidates to 30-minute. in-person interviews
  - Always send them one question upfront, giving them a research scenario that they will need to investigate ahead of time and be prepared to explain

Supervising in a "double helix" structure

PROs

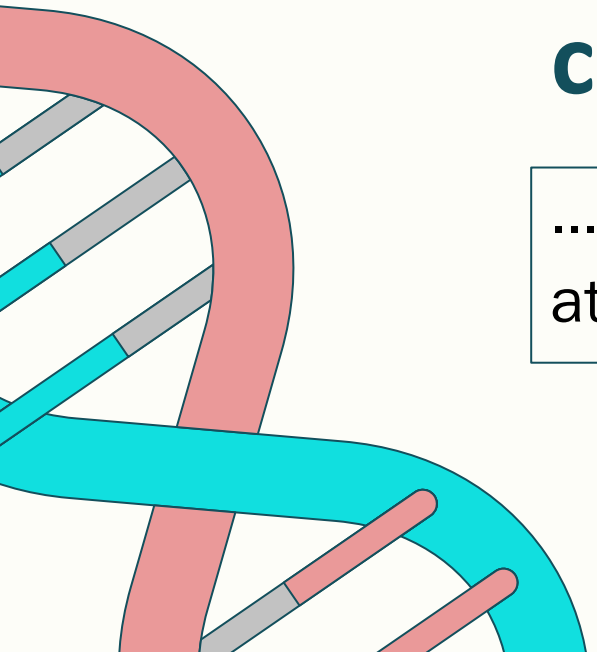
- Dividing the work
- Benefiting from different strengths
- Flexibility when the unexpected – or even the expected – strikes
- Capacity to expand program and processes
- Two voices to advocate

CONs

- Time spent coordinating
- Resisting calls to streamline
- External confusion on who "leads"
- Working style and program vision need to match or compliment

Put an emoji in the chat if you have...

...a peer research advising program at your institution.



How could a peer research adviser program benefit you?

padlet.com/linsinvl/pra_loex2023

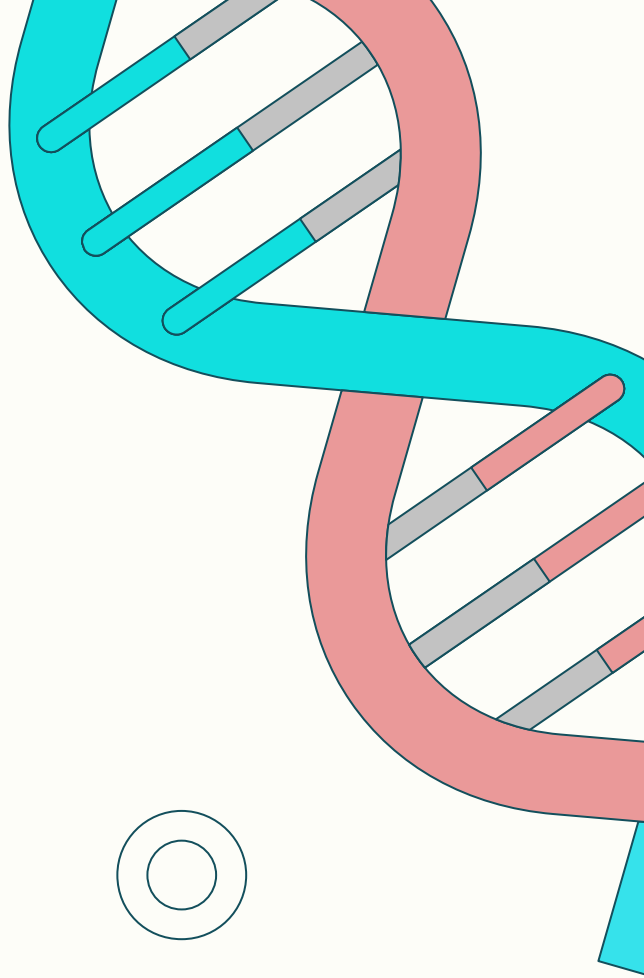
Been there

What were some of the pros or cons of your experience?

Not yet

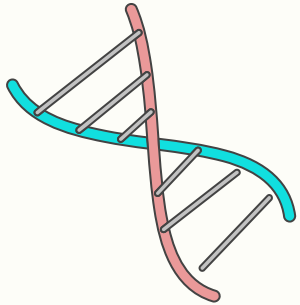
What organizational barriers might prevent you from implementing a peer-advising program?

How do we train our PRAs?



Training program

- Flipped-classroom style training with business librarians, covering:
  - Databases & search strategies
  - Reference consultations
  - Data collection procedures
- Shadowing current peer research advisers
- Reference appointment simulation practice

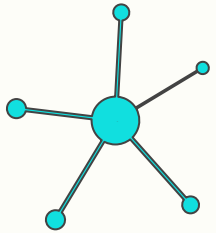


PRA Canvas Training Course

Let's take a tour!

How do we work as a team?

- Sharing a space
- Attend weekly meetings
- Email regularly throughout week
- Using Basecamp to organize tasks
- Canvas course for training
- OneDrive folder for shared files



Supervising students

Focus on the whole student, not just training them for the job

They're students first

They're NOT mini librarians

Share your experience with student employees

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For supervisors:

What strategies have you tried that worked well with student employees? What didn’t resonate with them?

For aspiring supervisors:

What assumptions do you have about student workers? How might they impact your view as a potential supervisor?

Pitfalls & Tips

Teams vs. LMS (Canvas)

Have only one hiring/recruiting cycle

Learn how to scaffold projects

Lower your expectations for what they can do

Be prepared for bad years

Be secure in your professional relevance

We want to learn from YOU!

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Been there

What is one thing you would tell someone else thinking of starting a peer advising program?

Not yet

What is one thing that excites/worries you about starting a peer advising program?

Both

Do you have any great resources to share on peer advising programs/

Thanks!

- Email Valerie or Elizabeth at bizinfo@jmu.libanswers.com for:
  - Position description – PRA and trainee
  - Post-consult Surveys or Forms
- COB 300 Research Guide: https://guides.lib.jmu.edu/cob300
- Padlet: padlet.com/linsinvl/pra_loex2023
- Slides: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XxBYxztrGhGXT4RNpveVUzEp2fZ8eguN/view?usp=sharing

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