

## Psychology Advising Leaders (PALs) Program Manuscript

### **a. Institutional Description**

Arizona State University (ASU) is a large 4-year public R1 institution with an enrollment of just over 75,000 total students. ASU has five distinctive campuses throughout the Phoenix metropolitan area and also has a significant online program. The Department of Psychology, where the Psychology Advising Leaders (PALs) program resides, is located at the Tempe campus, which is the largest campus with over 50,000 students currently enrolled. The Tempe campus is located in Tempe, Arizona, which is centrally located in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

### **b. Program Development (how, when, and why the program was developed, including problems encountered, organizational concerns, budget, and other practical considerations)**

The Psychology Advising Leaders (PALs) program began in January 2012. The program was developed in response to the First-Year Seminar courses moving from the College level to the Department level in Fall 2011. The faculty in the Department of Psychology did not have the time to teach the number of sections of the Psychology First-Year Seminar courses (PSY 191) that were needed (approximately 400 Psychology first-year students with 22 sections of the course), so the responsibility fell to the advising staff in our department. In order to teach the First-Year Seminar courses and continue providing advising for our department, this program was developed to train upper-class students to teach the First-Year Seminar courses. The idea was for the PALs program to not only give students the leadership and professional experience to help them grow personally and professionally, but also to meet a need for our department. The 4-semester course sequence was developed to allow students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be a successful instructor for our first-year seminar courses, and a proposal was written and submitted to the department chair. Once the program was approved, the first course in the program began in Spring 2012.

Some problems that were encountered along the way included budget and staffing to oversee the program. Because there were not enough funds in our budget to pay students to teach our first-year seminar courses, we designed the program for students to earn course credit toward their major instead of financial compensation. Also, because the Psychology advising staff was smaller than it is now and with more turn-over, the program initially was handed off multiple times to different advisors to oversee. This made recruitment and retention of students to the program difficult, at times. The program has had the same coordinator for the past two years now, which has allowed for greater stability and improvements to be made to the program.

### **c. Goals and Objectives**

The goals and objectives of the program are to provide a program that is beneficial to the students involved in the program, our first-year student population, and the advisors in our department. The students in the program benefit because they gain course credit toward their major, they become more engaged in the department and university, and have the opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. Our first-year students benefit by having the opportunity to be mentored by upper-class students in their major through their First-Year Seminar course and are provided additional assistance through New Student Orientation. Finally, our advisors benefit because they receive additional assistance at New Student Orientation and during our busy enrollment season, as the students in this program provide peer advising in our office. Also, the students in this program typically teach 9-10 sections of our PSY 191 (Psychology First-Year Seminar) course, which frees up our advisors from having to teach all of the sections. This allows our advisors more time for developmental advising and to foster those connections with our students. The goal of this program is to assist in the challenges that we see in our department – increase first-year retention, increase student engagement, and assist advisors with their heavy advising loads.

#### **d. Program Description**

The Psychology Advising Leaders (PALs) Program is a 4-semester sequence of courses that moves students from being a Psychology Orientation Assistant, to a Teaching Assistant for PSY 191 (Psychology First-Year Seminar course), to an Advising Assistant at New Student Orientation, and finally an Instructor for PSY 191 (Psychology First-Year Seminar course).

The first course in the sequence (Psych Orientation Assistant) focuses on leadership, customer service, employee trainings (FERPA, information security, and Title IX), and understanding the Psychology major requirements. Students in this class assist at New Student Orientation and assist in the Psychology Advising Office as peer advisors.

In their second semester, students are enrolled in a course (Psychology Advisor Assistant) where they focus on gaining experience in teaching and leading a group. Students are teaching assistants for our PSY 191 (Psychology First-Year Seminar) courses and assist in the Psychology Advising Office as peer advisors.

In their third semester, students are enrolled in a course (Psych Lead Advisor Assistant) where they focus on learning to teach a first-year seminar course including lesson planning, classroom management, professionalism in the classroom, and creating a syllabus. Students also assist as peer advisors at New Student Orientation.

Finally, in their fourth semester, student are enrolled in a course (Psychology Advanced Advising Assistant) where they have the opportunity to teach their own PSY 191 (Psychology First-Year Seminar) course. Students are supported throughout this semester to help them deal with any issues that arise and to continue to improve their lesson plans and teaching skills.

Students have the option to enroll in the Psychology Advanced Advising Assistant course for a second time during their senior year and teach again. These students take on an even larger leadership role by supervising a teaching assistant and mentoring the first-year student instructors in the group.

We strive to have high-achieving students as part of this program in order to have effective role models for our first-year students. To be admissible to the program, students must have a minimum of a 3.0 cumulative GPA, must be freshman or sophomore status (must be able to complete the entire 4 semester program), must be a Psychology major at our Tempe Campus, must have a recommendation from their PSY 191 instructor, and must be in good standing with the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. The students in the program must maintain a minimum of a 3.0 cumulative GPA each semester in order to remain in the program.

**e. Procedures used in program evaluation (quantitative and/or qualitative)**

A qualitative method that we use in evaluating the courses that are part of the PALs program are course evaluations. This is an opportunity for the students in the program to provide the instructor feedback on how useful the course was to them during that given semester. We receive course evaluations, as well, for our PSY 191 (Psychology First-Year Seminar) courses, which we review to gauge the effectiveness of our student instructors in teaching our first-year students. We also keep track of the percentage of Psychology first-year students who are retained from fall to fall to the department and to the university. Finally, we have recently begun to keep records of the number of participants in the PALs program, their GPA each semester, and their persistence through graduation.

In addition, each course in the PALs program sequence has an evaluation component in the sense that students must successfully complete the coursework and the orientation, peer advising, and/or teaching hours in order to move to the next course in the program. For the student instructors, the PALs coordinator/instructor also meets with them in class each week to provide support and to

evaluate how they are doing in teaching their class. If issues arise, the PALs coordinator/instructor will meet one-on-one with the student instructor to provide guidance and to determine a plan to improve moving forward.

A new addition of evaluation that we will be adding to the program this coming Fall 2017 semester will be one-on-one meetings with the student instructors during three points in the semester (beginning, middle, and end). These meetings will allow for the students to set individual goals for their performance and to check-in to evaluate whether they are meeting their goals along the way. This will allow for us to assess how successful they are in teaching their courses and for them to self-evaluate their performance as well.

**f. Results/outcome (impact on students and/or the institution)**

The course evaluations from our PSY 191 (Psychology First-Year Seminar) courses have been positive for the sections led by our student instructors. Some quotes from the PSY 191 students from this past Fall 2016 semester include:

“The student teacher was excellent and incredibly helpful. I emailed her for help multiple times throughout the semester.”

“\*Student Instructor Name\* was the most wonderful instructor. Very knowledgeable in all that we discussed, a very studious individual and she was always openly willing to help all of us if we needed help or had questions. She was also very encouraging about continuing on to med school and following our dreams.”

“The instructor was very attentive to students' needs and she was very understanding.”

In general, our first-year students comment that our student instructors are helpful, knowledgeable, and truly care about the students' needs. Our first-year students feel comfortable going to them for advice and guidance as our instructors are students themselves and are successful upper class students. The

negative feedback we receive is taken into consideration when modifying our program training for the future.

We also receive course evaluations for each of the courses in the PALs program course sequence. Overall, the feedback has been positive, as well. Some quotes from those evaluations are as follows:

“This class was great. Katie supported us throughout the semester, ensuring that we each had successful PSY 191 classes.”

“I have really enjoyed this class over the past two semesters and feel that it was well managed and an appropriate amount of work was assigned throughout the semester.”

“She is good at what she does. Well organized and keeps the class fun and enjoyable.”

We have also taken the feedback from the students and their ideas for improvement into consideration when making changes to the program. For example, peer advising has not always been part of the program, but was implemented due to a combination of the student’s feedback and the need for that assistance in our advising office.

In regards to our retention rates, our retention of our first-year students from fall to fall has improved since the PALs program has started. The retention of first-year Psychology students to our department has improved from 45.8% to 51.3% between the 2011-2012 year and the 2015-2016 year. The retention of first-year Psychology students to the university has improved from 73.5% to 79.7% between the 2011-2012 year and the 2015-2016 year. While we cannot contribute this improvement solely to the PALs program, it is a new initiative that began during these years that we have noticed has made an impact on our first-year students’ engagement in the department and the university as a whole.

The program itself has grown in student interest, over the years. The first Psych Orientation Assistant course in Spring 2012 started with 9 students. The enrollment in that course has now doubled

to 18 students this Spring 2017 semester. As the program has grown, it has allowed for more PSY 191 (Psychology First-Year Seminar) courses to be taught by student instructors, which has further allowed for advisors to spend more time on advising and program development in other areas.

**g. Potential for adaptation by other institutions**

This program has great potential to be adapted by other institutions, regardless of the size of the institution or the academic department, since the majority of the content is not specific to the Psychology major. Many departments teach first-year seminar courses that can be taught by upper-class students, as long as they are prepared properly to do so. Teaching a course is a great responsibility, so we believe that the 4-semester sequence of coursework is necessary in preparing students to teach these courses. In addition to utilizing this program for first-year seminar courses, the format could be modified and used as a training program for peer advisors.

The PALs program is not just Psychology-focused and teaches concepts that are easily transferrable to another program. The first course (Psych Orientation Assistant) teaches concepts and skills such as customer service, leadership, and understanding diversity that can be used in any other program. The rest of the courses in the PALs program teach concepts related to advising and teaching, such as understanding student resources, classroom management, and professionalism in the classroom that can also be applied to another program. While the goal of the program and the practical aspects of the program may change, many of the lessons and the sequence of increased leadership and responsibility that this program brings can be adapted by other programs and institutions.