

**Planning Document**

**Introducing Peer Research Consultants in an Academic Library**

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## **Scope**

In an effort to better serve the academic needs of our student population, the library at Bristol Community College is planning to expand its tutoring services by introducing a peer research consulting program. This paper will summarize the overall planning process, any relevant assessments, financial requirements, and provide a general layout for the implementation and objectives of these services.

## **About the Library**

Bristol Community College, established in 1965, is located in Massachusetts, with its primary campus in Fall River. Additional campuses are located in several other Massachusetts locations, including Taunton, Attleboro, and New Bedford. As of the fall 2025 semester, 8,010 students were enrolled (Bristol Community College, 2025). Bristol Community College currently has 117 academic programs available, with a student-to-faculty ratio of 16 to 1 and more than 80 transfer agreements (Bristol Community College, 2025a). The library at Bristol Community College, referred to as the Library Learning Commons, is available to students at all four campus locations, as well as online. The Library Learning Commons offers a tutoring and writing center, which can be visited by appointment, as well as the “Book-A-Librarian” service for virtual reference appointments. The library boasts an extensive collection, and physical materials are available for pickup at all four campus locations (Bristol Community College, 2025b).

## **Planning Steps**

In order to create a viable plan for introducing a peer research consulting program to the Library Learning Commons, various existing programs at other academic institutions were considered. For example, Chester Fritz Library at the University of North Dakota has developed and

successfully implemented a peer research consultant program with a group of student assistants (Clark et al., 2020). The students featured in this case study, in partnership with university reference librarians, were required to complete a training program in order to demonstrate reference and subject competency (Clark et al., 2020, pg. 7). Similarly, Pacific University has successfully provided peer tutoring services, composed of faculty-approved undergraduate students that have demonstrated particular expertise in a variety of subjects (Ching, 2014). Considering how these programs, as well as other similar programs, have been implemented will provide a clear vision of how to create a plan with high chances of success.

### **Mission**

To enhance opportunities for student academic growth and success through an expansion of current tutoring services and the implementation of a team of well-trained peer research consultants.

### **Vision**

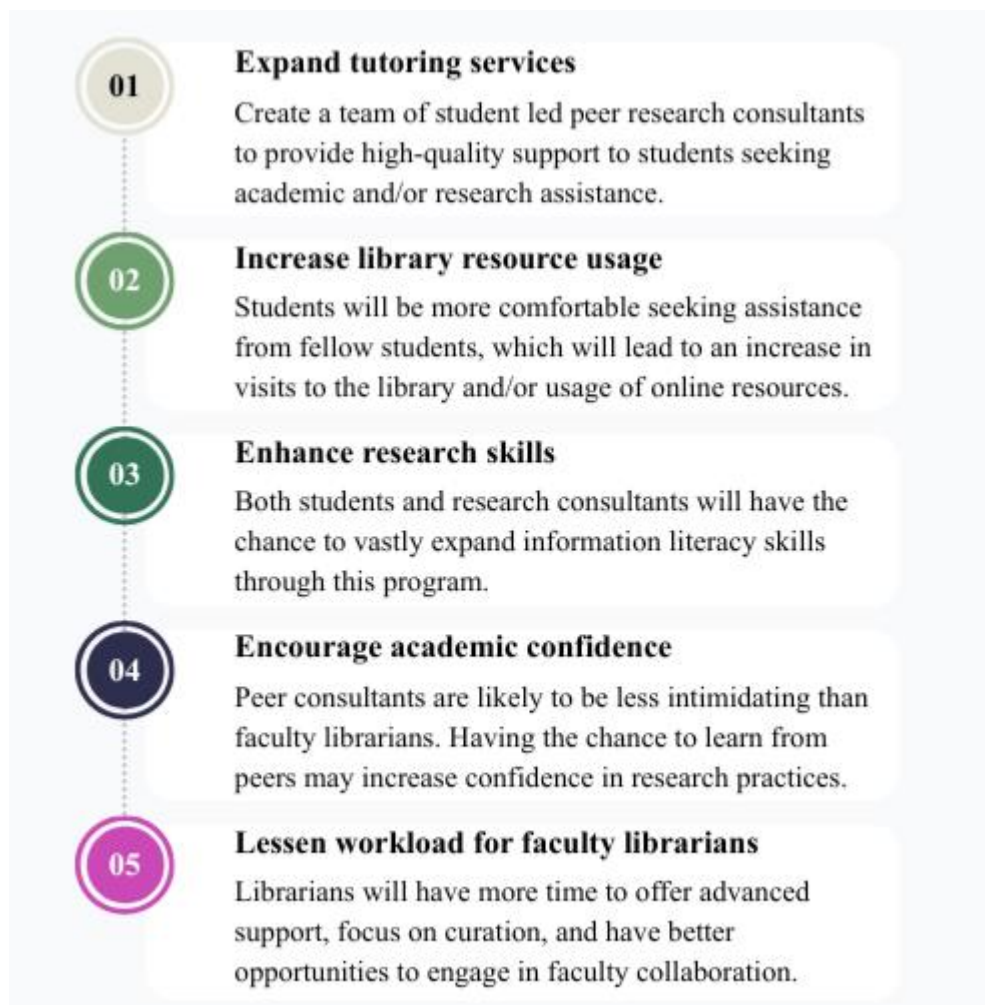
For all students, remote and in-person, to have access to the tutoring and peer research consultation services necessary to thrive academically, and to be involved in a positive and collaborative academic experience. Students will be more at ease seeking academic support from other peers, which will promote collaboration and increase library usage (Clark et al., 2020, pg. 4).

### **Needs assessment**

The increased need for reference and tutoring services in the library, and the subsequent strain placed on librarians to manage a growing number of in-person and virtual appointments, has led to the need for expanded tutoring services and the creation of a peer research consultant program.

This will allow students to seek out research assistance from fellow students, while at the same time lessening the increasing pressure on faculty librarians. According to the case study “Students report a preference to work with their peers rather than a professional librarian because they feel more comfortable and less intimidated with their peers when asking for assistance” (Clark et al., 2020, pg. 4).

## Goals and objectives



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## Activities/Action plan

Implementing this plan is expected to take approximately one year to complete, including training time for any prospective student consultants.

1. Develop a precise depiction of which tasks research consultants will be participating in on a daily basis, along with salary and scheduling information, and a description of the length of employment expectations.
2. Once the plan is approved, secure funding from relevant stakeholders, apply for grants, and ascertain whether some amount of funding may be allocated from the existing budget.
3. Upon acquisition of funds, the hiring process will begin.
  - a. The program will need to be marketed throughout campus, which will include a detailed list of preferred qualifications and the description of training and employment expectations to attract the most qualified candidates.
  - b. The hiring process will involve a professional in-person interview and will require the submission of a resume and cover letter.
  - c. Candidates will be evaluated on professionalism, communication skills, prior customer service experience, and will be expected to be friendly and have an introductory understanding of library operations.
4. Upon hiring qualified candidates, the training process will commence. A training model will be developed based on the case study *Development, implementation and importance of an undergraduate peer research consultant program at the University of North Dakota's Chester Fritz Library*.

- a. Student consultants will be trained in library operations, reference services, along with “customer service, diversity issues, the code of ethics and safety practices” (Clark et al., 2020, pg. 11).
  - b. Training will be expected to last approximately one month but may be shortened or lengthened based on individual performance and prior experience.
5. After the completion of training, peer consultants will begin providing services to their fellow students. This will include a monitoring period of two weeks to ensure quality of service provided (Clark et al., 2020).

## **Funding**

Funding will be requested from the college administration, along with any existing work-study funds that may be allocated to the program. If additional funding is necessary, the library will apply for any and all relevant grants available from the American Library Association and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, 2025).

## **Program Budget**

The majority of the budget will be put toward student consultant wages, which will be in accordance with the Massachusetts state minimum wage requirement of \$15.00 per hour (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2023). Provided the students work part-time, a maximum of 15 hours per week, during a nine-month period of approximately 39 weeks, this portion of the budget will be an estimated \$8,775.00 paid per student consultant. With an initial hiring group of three consultants, this will be a total of \$26,325.00 for the academic year. An additional portion

of the budget will be allocated to training materials, such as virtual and print resources. This is expected to encompass less than \$1,000.00 of the budget.

### **Relevant Policies & Standards**

As outlined in the article *Building a Peer-Learning Service for Students in an Academic Library*, consultants should meet the following standards:

- Confidence in their own research abilities and academic knowledge
- Proficiency in secondary research using an array of resources and methods
- Ability to articulate the role of an academic library in higher education
- Ability to engage their peers in collaboratively meeting information needs (O'Kelly et al., 2015).

Additionally, in the article *Keeping up with Peer Tutoring* published by the Association of College & Research Libraries, it is suggested to give particular consideration to the following topics when developing a plan for peer consulting services: Target audience, a scope of what consultants will be expected to cover, plans for the training, supervision, and scheduling of consultants, data collection, service evaluation, as well as whether services will be provided in-person, virtually, or both (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2023).

### **Staffing & Layout of the Service**

Three students will be hired for the initial group of student research consultants. Faculty librarians will be expected to participate in training consultants, although much of the training will be presented to consultants in an on-line, self-paced format based on specific duties within the library. This initial group will be expected to provide research consultations across all

subjects, with the potential of providing peer-tutoring services as well. Duties might include assisting students with locating print and online materials, one-on-one or small group reference services, and providing general information literacy instruction. The service is expected to increase student usage of the library spaces and improve overall student success and achievement.

### **Public relations**

This service will be marketed around the campus using table tents, posters, and other signage, as well as on all college social media platforms. As recommended in the previously mentioned University of North Dakota case study, rebranding signage in the library from “Ask a Librarian” to “Ask Us” will make the service “more inclusive of student involvement” (Clark et al., 2020, pg. 14). Additionally, peer consultants will wear visible nametags indicating their station and availability.

### **Program Measurement**

At the end of the first complete academic year that student research consultants have provided services, a survey will be given to all students to ascertain effectiveness, success, and value of the program. Faculty and peer consultants will also be asked to provide feedback on the program, including any suggestions for improvement. It is recommended that faculty librarians frequently assess consultant performance throughout the entirety of the program.

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