

## **Have you considered using a Peer Learning Assistant (PLA) in your courses?**

PLAs can assist you in your classroom in a number of ways: facilitating team projects, laboratory activities, small group discussions, and/or community placements; reviewing draft writing assignments, and/or Cicada discussions. They can be especially useful in introductory courses in all disciplines, as they can assist with the development of student skills in such areas as group project work and writing. And PLAs could be valuable in First Year Intensive (FYI) courses, as they can provide peer support on the academic aspects of the transition to college. Please note that PLAs do not help with grading, something for which you would need a graduate Teaching Assistant (TA).

The overwhelming majority of PLAs work for academic credit, so that's why this (during academic advising week) is a good time to approach a potential PLA, because students are currently figuring out their plans for next year. Usually faculty select PLAs who have taken their courses in the past, and those of us who have used PLAs have learned that good interpersonal skills are as or more important than complete mastery of course material. Sometimes a "B" student who had to struggle a bit can relate better to student difficulties. It's best if the PLA attends the class, so it is a good idea to approach them now so that they can schedule appropriately or get permission for a fifth course. Academic credit is generally in the form of a directed reading or independent study designation in the department. Some faculty who use a number of PLAs set up a special course designation for their PLAs.

As an alternative to earning academic credit, some PLAs get paid. Possible sources include federal work study money (if the student is eligible) or departmental funds. In the most recent semester when PLAs were paid, they got \$8.50 per hour.

If you are interested in learning more about how PLAs can support your course-related activities, please contact Mary-Ellen Boyle ([mboyle@clarku.edu](mailto:mboyle@clarku.edu)). Mary-Ellen can connect you with Clark faculty in your discipline who have used PLAs in the past, and can steer you to the relevant scholarly literature if you are interested.