



What are ULAs? What do they do? Undergraduate Learning Assistants (ULAs) are a type of near-peer instruction. As originally conceived, this model was designed to “stimulate instructional change in classrooms and shift attitudes among students, teachers, and administrators to adopt evidence-based teaching methods” (Barrasso, 2021). Unique to the LA Model, LAs primary role is to support student learning during classroom instruction. This work informs and is informed by preparation meetings with other members of their course teaching team and ongoing pedagogical development.

What is the significance of the ULA Program in Lyman Briggs College? In Lyman Briggs College (LBC or “Briggs”), we have had ULAs since the 1960s. ULA work is deeply integrated into Briggs courses. In the Fall 2022 semester, 78% of the course sections* and 78% of the seats offered were supported by ULAs. In the same semester, 65% of the Briggs faculty teaching were working with ULAs in at least one of their courses. The overwhelming majority of Briggs courses and instructors engage the ULA program.

For many [LA programs](#), the goals are to 1) enable course transformation to include more evidence-based practices, 2) decrease rates of students receiving Ds, Fs, or withdrawing), and 3) recruit more K-12 teachers. In LBC, many of our courses have already undergone significant transformation. Therefore in Briggs’ we want to continue and build upon our evidence-based and learner-centered course practices and create leadership experiences for our students with broad applications beyond their time in LBC. To do this, we have six program goals, which include goals impacting the College, the faculty, the ULAs, and students in courses supported by ULAs.

Program Goals:

Goal 1: Implement safety protocols and evidence-based practices in undergraduate courses.

Here “safety” encompasses both University campus policies (e.g. mandatory reporting and Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct) and lab safety standards (e.g. chemical and biological safety standards where applicable). “Evidence-based practices” includes research-based course designs in Briggs classes (i.e. studio physics, flipped lectures, course-based research experiences) as well as course environment practices like inclusive and learner-centered teaching practices. The College and supervising faculty have a responsibility to ensure that all ULAs are aware of these protocols, and policies, and are prepared to implement them in their course context.

Goal 2: Diversify representation in undergraduate course leadership.

As members of instructional teams, ULAs are a part of course leadership. While the College strives to increase representation at the faculty level as a long-term goal, an additional strategy to diversify the course leadership representation is through the hiring of ULAs. The nimble and short-term hiring of ULAs allows for a swifter increase in representation in College course leadership. The supervising faculty have a responsibility to be attentive to equitable hiring practices as they make ULA hiring decisions. The College has a responsibility to increase and assess access to ULA job opportunities.

Goal 3: Increase pedagogical efficacy for the ULAs.

For ULAs to be effective in supporting student learning, they must be effective in their pedagogical practices. This includes developing a foundational understanding of how learning works and a capacity to identify and



handle issues of inclusion in their classrooms. The responsibility to foster pedagogical efficacy among ULAs lies both with the College (for knowledge of and reflection about general best-practices) and the supervising faculty (for ongoing mentoring / feedback, and discipline-specific pedagogical content knowledge).

Goal 4: Provide ULAs with opportunities to explore teaching careers & develop transferable leadership skills.

While most Briggs students come to the College intending to pursue a health profession, the ULA experience is a venue for leadership development for them. ULAs can explore teaching as a career and/ or as a set of highly-valuable transferable skills. Both the College and supervising faculty have the responsibility of framing the ULA work as a professional development opportunity.

Goal 5: Develop ULAs interest, competence, and recognition in the disciplines.

While many ULAs work in courses different from their major or disciplinary interest, in their ULA work they can develop their scientific or professional identity. In the literature, science identity incorporates interest, competence, and recognition in a field. One example of “competence” is how many senior ULAs note that their MCAT exam preparation is reduced in the field where they ULA due to the ongoing deepening of understanding that happens when you are deeply involved in helping someone else learn. Cultivating academic interest, competence, and recognition is a joint responsibility between the College and supervising faculty; the ULA program directly contributes to this.

Goal 6: Improve student satisfaction and success in introductory courses.

ULA work has been shown to increase student satisfaction, course pass rate, and belonging in STEM communities (Alcalde & Nagel, 2018; Alzen, et al., 2018; Clements, et al., 2022). Thus to embrace our College goals related to student success, we will continue to implement and innovate ULA practices in the College. By focusing on introductory courses, we can maximize the impact of the ULA program in the College. Thus implementing and maintaining excellence in the ULA program is again a joint responsibility between the College and supervising faculty.

*For the science and math courses, a section is one recitation or lab section. For courses without recitations or lab sections, one course is one section.

References

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