Catholic Campus Ministry

Assessment Report: The Peer Minister Formation Program

2012-2013
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover effective ways to instill the Catholic Vincentian approach to leadership, prayer, and hospitality in our peer ministers, particularly in their work in CCM. To do so, we began a year-long formation program for peer ministers that focused on key figures and virtues of the Vincentian heritage, and evaluated the peer ministers’ responses to that program periodically throughout the year. The methodology consisted of a pre- and post-test tool, as well as reflection questions administered quarterly. Findings indicated that participants in the program generally expanded their personal practice of prayer, gained a greater specific understanding of Vincentian history, and developed a sense of community and cohort among one another that helped empower them in their particular roles. There were fewer indications that the peer ministers were able to articulate the connection between their particular work and the Vincentian approach to hospitality and leadership. Implications of these findings suggest that the formation program should continue, with a greater emphasis on practical application and personal experience of the peer ministers themselves.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

What is the question being asked?
Our question for this year’s assessment project was the following: How can CCM peer ministers be instructed and formed so that they leave their year of ministry with a greater understanding of the Catholic and Vincentian approach to prayer, leadership, and hospitality, and the capability to apply that approach to their work in CCM?

What learning outcomes are being assessed?
In light of this question, we assigned three particular learning outcomes to the project:

- CCM peer ministers will articulate the primary virtues and historical figures of the Vincentian tradition.
- CCM peer ministers will identify their personal approach to prayer, leadership, and hospitality.
- CCM peer ministers will apply the virtues of Vincentian leadership and hospitality to their particular peer ministry roles.

How does answering this question help your department?
Answering this question is valuable to our department in that it will allow us to understand how well we are currently equipping our student leaders with a clear understanding of their unique role as Catholic Vincentian leaders at DePaul University. Peer ministers are absolutely essential to the engagement of the DePaul student community in DePaul’s Catholic identity, and in the development of the Catholic faith community on campus. In order to be effective, they must engage in leadership and spiritual formation that is clearly imprinted with the values of Catholic Vincentianism. Only if the peer ministers are strong in their practice of Catholic faith and prayer, and consistently embody the Vincentian spirit of leadership and hospitality, can a Catholic Vincentian faith community of DePaul students develop and thrive.
How is the question linked to the Student Affairs Strategic Plan (2010-2013) and Vision Twenty18 goals?

In CCM we recognize our unique responsibility to offer spiritual and leadership formation in a Catholic context, with an emphasis on the Catholic aspects of the Vincentian approach to leadership and spirituality. CCM’s student leaders are essential to the dissemination of the Catholic Vincentian mission to the greater university population.

- By virtue of strengthening the peer ministers’ gifts of Catholic Vincentian leadership and spiritual engagement, we directly engage Goal 2.1 of the Divisional Strategic Plan, in strengthening and enhancing student programs and services.
- This assessment also directly addresses Objective 3a in the Vision Twenty18 Strategic Plan for DePaul, elevating our distinctive Catholic and Vincentian identity across the university. In developing peer ministers’ understanding of and engagement with the Catholic Vincentian approach to leadership and spirituality, we encourage them to share the Vincentian mission with the greater community, and encounter the various points of their educational journey with their Catholic Vincentian identity fully visible and engaged.

What relevant research and/or literature informs or contextualizes this project?

Fr Dennis Holtschnieder’s article “No Small Matter: Leadership for Institutional Culture in Vincentian Higher Education,” speaks to the need for development of a Catholic Vincentian approach to leadership and spirituality at a Vincentian institution like DePaul, particularly among laypeople. In this article, he speaks to the challenge of maintaining a religious mission in a contemporary university environment. He also outlines a number of suggestions to help transfer the responsibility of maintaining and growing the mission to the hands of the laity. With regard to Holtschnieder’s diagnosis of this problem and suggestions for a solution, we at CCM see a distinct need to educate student leaders in their Catholic faith and Vincentian heritage, so that they may go out and serve as leaders steeped in the values of their faith—not only during their university years, but beyond that into their adulthood, when they will hopefully continue to bring those values to their work, faith, and lives.


METHODOLOGY

On what group(s) of individuals did the question focus?

The question focused specifically on the students who were hired as peer ministers for the 2012-13 school year. We began the year with eleven peer ministers. One left her position after the fall quarter and was replaced by another student starting in winter quarter, and another joined the group as a retreat leader starting winter quarter. We focused on this group because we wanted to create a sense of a cohort of leadership among them, in which they could learn and grow together as a group, share their experiences of growth as leaders of faith, and support one another in their programs and efforts.
What steps were taken to ensure consent of participants? How did you inform participants of their role in this assessment project? Was participation optional?

For the purpose of consent, we had all participants fill out a consent form that allowed the assessor to use their reflection responses anonymously in the final assessment report.

At the start of the school year, we informed the peer ministers that we would be assessing their formation program throughout the year, and would be asking them for personal responses to various reflection questions each quarter. We also had them take a pre-test, which was subsequently redistributed as a post-test for them to take at the end of the school year.

Participation in the assessment was mandatory. Participants did have the option to refuse consent to be directly quoted in the final report.

Was any identifying information about individual participants collected through this assessment? If so, what precautions were taken to keep this information secure?

All reports were kept in my office at all times.

Describe the methods used to answer the question, as well as a description and size of the group initially invited to participate in the project.

The assessment tools consisted of a pre/post-test that was given to the students at the beginning of their term as a peer minister and at the end, and quarterly sets of reflection questions. The group consisted of thirteen unique individuals; one left her position at the end of fall quarter, and two new students began at the start of the winter quarter. The students were all undergraduates: one freshman, two sophomores, six juniors, and four seniors.

Please include a copy of the assessment instruments and consent forms.

Assessment tool #1: Pre/Post-Test
Catholic Campus Ministry
Peer Minister Vincentian Formation
Final Assessment: 5/24/13

An essential aspect of the work of CCM peer ministers is their spiritual formation in the Catholic Vincentian tradition. We would like to establish a starting point with each of you to see where you are on your spiritual journey, so that we may better accompany you this year as you grow in your faith and as a minister.

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. THERE ARE NO RIGHT ANSWERS! This is just the first part of the process of Vincentian formation that our peer ministers will be engaging in throughout this year.

Name: ____________________________________________
Peer Ministry Title: ___________________________________
VINCENTIAN HOSPITALITY
1. How would you define the concept of “hospitality”?
2. How do you currently exhibit hospitality in the environment of CCM?
3. How do you think CCM peer ministers are called to exhibit hospitality?

LEADERSHIP
1. How would you describe yourself as a leader? Describe your strengths, as well as areas in which you’d like to grow in leadership.
2. What particular gifts do you think are needed to be a truly Vincentian leader?

PRAYER
1. How do you engage in prayer? This could be in a communal setting (such as going to church) or in a personal setting.
2. In what ways would you like to grow in your own prayer life?
3. Are you familiar with St Vincent’s approach to prayer? If so, what is your understanding of it?

Assessment Tool #2: Fall Quarter Assessment Questions for Peer Ministers
1. Reflect on your personal approach to prayer. How has your role as a peer minister in the Vincentian tradition influenced your approach to prayer?
   - This question refers to the second learning outcome in the Assessment Plan, “CCM peer ministers will identify their personal approach to prayer, leadership, and hospitality.”
2. In examining the historical figures of St Vincent De Paul and St Louise De Marillac, what in their lives and ministries particularly resonates with you?
   - This question refers to the first learning outcome in the Assessment Plan, “CCM peer ministers will articulate the primary virtues and historical figures of the Vincentian tradition.”

Assessment Tool #3: Winter Quarter Reflection Questions
1. Describe an experience in which you have served as a leader in ministry this past quarter. What values informed your actions? What feelings did this experience of being a leader evoke in you?
   - This question refers to the third learning outcome in the Assessment Plan, “CCM peer ministers will apply the virtues of Vincentian leadership and hospitality to their particular peer ministry roles.”
2. How has this Lent been for you? Describe any notable spiritual moments you have experienced this year during Lent, with particular attention to the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.
   - This question refers to the second learning outcome in the Assessment Plan, “CCM peer ministers will identify their personal approach to prayer, leadership, and hospitality.”
Assessment Tool #4: Spring Quarter Reflection Questions

Please respond to the following questions, with a response of at least 200 words for each question.

1. Looking back on the process of the Peer Minister Formation Program for the 2012-13 school year, what specifically do you feel you have learned about leadership, Vincentian heritage, and your personal experience and practice of prayer and spirituality? When reflecting on this question, note that this program included:
   - the day-long retreat in September,
   - monthly formation sessions,
   - weekly one-on-one meetings with your supervisor,
   - the winter Vincentian retreat,
   - and your personal duties and responsibilities as a peer minister.

2. What was your favorite aspect of the Peer Minister Formation Program, and what benefit did you gain from it? What would you like to have been done differently in the Peer Minister Formation Program? Please be specific.

Assessment Tool #5: Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

CCM Assessment Project 2012-13: Vincentian Leadership Formation

Principal Investigator: Jackie Posek
Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA
Department (School, College): Catholic Campus Ministry

What is the purpose of this research?

We are asking you to be in a research study because we are trying to learn more about effective ways to help students grow in their understanding of Vincentian approaches to leadership, hospitality, and prayer. This study is being conducted by Catholic Campus Ministry staff at DePaul University. We hope to include about 12 people in the research.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a peer minister in the Catholic Campus Ministry department.

What is involved in being in the research study?

If you agree to be in this study, being in the research involves a brief pretest and posttest, one-on-one meetings with your supervisor, and quarterly reflection responses to particular questions. The pre- and posttests and quarterly reflection questions will address your experiences of Vincentian formation, your experience of leadership, and your approach to personal prayer and spiritual practice.
**How much time will this take?**

This study will take place over the course of the 2012-13 school year. The pre- and posttests should take 10-15 minutes to complete. One-on-one meetings with supervisors will take one hour per week. The quarterly reflection questions should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

**Can you decide not to participate?**

As a peer minister, your participation in the various parts of the assessment is mandatory. You do have the option to refuse access to your written materials to be quoted in the assessment report of the project.

**Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?**

The research records will be kept and stored securely. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study or publish a paper to share the research with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. We will not include your name or any information that will directly identify you. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is.

**You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent from the Subject:**

I have read the above information. By signing below, I indicate my consent for all materials to be used and quoted in the assessment report.

Signature: ____________________________________________
Printed name: _______________________________________
Date: ________________

I have read the above information. By signing below, I indicate that I DO NOT WANT to be quoted from the materials I submitted in the assessment report

Signature: ____________________________________________
Printed Name: _______________________________________
Date: ________________

**End of Assessment Tool Section**

**FINDINGS/RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Describe the results*

Participant response rate:
- 13 participants over the course of the year
- 10 respondents

Relevant participant demographic data
- All undergraduates: one freshman, two sophomores, six juniors, four seniors
- Gender: three men, ten women
- Race/ethnicity: one African-American, four Latina, eight Caucasian
- Religion: all identify as Roman Catholic

What did you learn from the assessment?
Based on your analysis, what were the key findings?
- The students articulated the value of community in leadership.
  - Seven of the ten respondents spoke specifically and extensively about the importance of community in their role as a peer minister and in their spiritual lives.
  - Several spoke about the responsibility of a leader to help build community; others referred to the importance of community for them personally to grow in leadership and faith.
  - Several gave specific examples of their intentional actions to help build community among DePaul students through CCM: one talked about reaching out and meeting new people deliberately at Sunday Night Mass; another referred to game nights she hosted at her apartment to help new students get to know one another.
  - Another student referred to peer ministers as the “ears” of the CCM community, noting her responsibility to listen to the needs of the members of the community and make sure they are being addressed.

- Nearly all the respondents identified the value of the establishment of a cohort of leaders that consistently gathered throughout the year.
  - The majority of the respondents noted that they were grateful for the chance to gather with other peer ministers each month to get to know one another and share their experiences as leaders in their programs.
  - They appreciated that others were going through similar experiences and challenges, and became more supportive of others’ programs, attending and participating in events that were outside their direct role of leadership.

- The students identified communal prayer as a vital part of Catholic Vincentian spiritual practice, and also engaged in new kinds of prayer.
  - Eight of the ten respondents referred specifically to the importance of prayer in a communal setting, such as Mass or Taize prayer groups, for a well-developed spiritual life.
  - For four of these respondents, their appreciation of communal prayer was new to them over the course of this year, as indicated by their answers to the pretest and posttest questions regarding prayer practice.
  - One student noted the importance of balancing personal prayer with communal prayer.
  - Additionally, six respondents articulated that they had embraced a new form of prayer during the year. One student tried the rosary; another began to pray through
encounters with nature; another attempted to engage God at different points in the day; another attended Masses in different churches and formats, such as a primarily African-American worship community at St Sabinas parish and a Latin Mass at St John Cansius parish.

- The students identified the vital importance of personal reflection in the role of a specifically Vincentian leader.
  - Five respondents referred to the importance of reflection in their role as peer ministers.
  - Three of them specifically connected the idea of reflection with the Vincentian approach to leadership and prayer.

- The students articulated the responsibility of peer ministers to be mentors and role models in the community.
  - Five respondents named their responsibility as role models and mentors to the members of the community, particularly the younger ones.
  - One respondent referred to the peer ministers as “the face of CCM,” and both she and another respondent made particular reference to the fact that peer ministers always retain that identity as a role model, even when they are not in the CCM office or participating in CCM activities.
  - Three respondents talked about the importance of mentoring younger students and helping them in their transition to college.

- Responses to the parts of the program that focused on learning about the Vincentian heritage varied a great deal.
  - Six respondents articulated ways in which St Vincent and St Louise are models for them in terms of leadership.
  - Two respondents referred to St Louise’s strong leadership as a woman; one respondent talked about St Vincent’s high standard of service to others; two respondents spoke of the Vincentian approach to reflection as vital to leadership.
  - However, some respondents did not engage with the parts of the formation program that dealt with the figures from Vincentian history.
    - This was a common theme among students who had lived in the Vincent and Louise House in previous years, and those who were living there this year; they claimed that the material we covered was repetitive and not illuminating for them.

How, if at all, did the results surprise you?
I would say that the results were extremely informative and enlightening, rather than surprising. The primary lesson learned was that the format of the formation meetings should be structured differently to create more concrete connections between the Vincentian history and the students’ experiences. We also discovered areas of overlap in the material we were covering and the topics that were discussed in the Vincent and Louise community class and the Vincentian Mission Fellows formation events. As five of our peer ministers lived in the V&L house either this year or in years past, it will behoove us to examine those curricula and make sure to explore different material.
What does this project contribute to the field or the Division of Student Affairs?
This project helps to determine how best to educate and inspire students in the mission of DePaul, and incorporate the tenets and values of Vincentian leadership into their work as student leaders, regardless of the area of leadership they engage in. As we create effective ways to impart Vincentian formation upon our leaders in CCM, we can adapt those tools for use in other student leadership programs such as the Common Experience or the Winter Leadership Conference.

Were there specific challenges or limitations to the project that may have affected the results or use of the results?

- Obviously we were dealing with quite a small sample of students in this assessment, which creates challenges in assessing qualitative data. Two students started in the middle of the year, and did not take the pretest; one student left the position at the end of fall quarter. We also had one peer minister who did not respond to the reflection questions throughout the year, despite prompts from myself and his supervisor.

- Another challenge is the question of correlation vs. causation, which I believe is a common issue in assessment. A number of our peer ministers are involved in other leadership roles on campus; one is a STARS mentor, another a member of the Mock Trial organization, another the head of the Accounting Club, another a Vincentian Mission Fellow. While we feel we can assert that these students were impacted by the training and experiences they had in their peer ministry positions, we cannot isolate the growth that they experienced this year directly to their experiences with CCM. Through the questions, particularly the final set of reflection questions, we tried to direct their responses to this particular experience of formation, and we feel that worked well to help them focus on their work as peer ministers.

IMPLICATIONS

Based on this project, what actions will the department take to improve learning or engagement?
This assessment project will greatly shape the planning and execution of the peer minister leadership formation program for the 2013-14 school year. Some changes that have been inspired by this report:

- Next year’s formation program will be overseen by a single staffperson, the Assistant Director. This year’s presentations were divided up among the staff, with each staff member taking a meeting in which they would present on a particular Vincentian figure and a particular Vincentian virtue. There was not a particular format that was utilized; therefore the presentations were not as consistent or coherent when taken as a whole program as would be desired. Other staff members will still be involved in the presentation process next year, but the planning and structure of the program will be overseen by a single person, which will help lead to a more coherent program.

- A variety of prayer forms will be used in the context of the meetings, so that peer ministers may be introduced to different forms of prayer. These may include things like meditation, the rosary, Lectio Divina, or scriptural study. This will strengthen the experiential aspect of the program;
rather than simply telling the students that Vincentians should pray, we will help them to actually engage in prayer in different ways.

- Formation sessions will include lessons in practical aspects of leadership. Some of these aspects may include public speaking, diversity and issues of privilege, active listening skills, and methods of outreach to new students. These particular skills will be framed in the context of Vincentian leadership, and how a Vincentian leader uniquely utilizes these skills in his or her role of leadership.
- Formation sessions will also incorporate more personal reflection and sharing of peer ministers’ experiences in their leadership. This was widely requested from the students, and the moments of sharing that did take place were among the most highly rated aspects of the program.
- We are currently considering whether to extend the formation program to those students who are involved in programming in CCM but are not officially hired as peer ministers, such as the members of the liturgy team or the Search retreat teams. The benefit to making this change would be that more students would gain access to particular training in Vincentian leadership and spirituality. The drawback to this change could potentially be that the experience of the cohort could be compromised if there were non-peer ministers who attended, particularly if their attendance was inconsistent.

*What implications does this project have for other departments at the university or Student Affairs as a whole?*

As I mentioned above, this project assists in establishing an effective method for helping student leaders to explore Vincentian leadership and incorporate Vincentian values into their own leadership practice. Next year will be a pivotal year for the program; with the feedback and results of this assessment, we are poised to create a Vincentian leadership program that will be extremely effective in shaping students’ understanding of their role as leaders in a Vincentian community. This program can be utilized and shared with other departments, and can even be shaped to adapt to other populations that are not religiously based. I’m excited to see how this project unfolds in the coming year, and to share it with other departments who currently engage in student leadership formation programs but may not yet have found an effective means to introduce the Vincentian aspect of leadership to their students.

*How will the results of your project be shared with participants and other key stakeholders?*

Along with the other assessment projects from this year, CCM’s project will be presented at the assessment celebration in the fall quarter. I will share it with the other departments in University Ministry (the Office of Religious Diversity and the Vincentian Community Service Office). I also intend to share the report with the Common Experience planning committee, which I sit on, as we plan next year’s curriculum for the Common Experience and examine ways to continue to expand the theme of Vincentian leadership in the presentation of SRL.

*What follow-up studies or future projects might help further assess this topic?*

We will utilize a similar assessment format for the peer ministers next year, so that we may see if the changes implemented help us to achieve the intended learning outcomes.