Trying on Teaching for Student Success:  
The Learning Assistant Program at a Two-Year College  
Dr. Carolyn F Schick, Montgomery College, Rockville, Maryland

**ABOUT THE PROGRAM**  
The Learning Assistant Program at Montgomery College places experienced undergraduate students in the classroom to assist their fellow STEM students. It is modeled after the nationally recognized Learning Assistant program at the University of Colorado, Boulder and adapted for implementation in the Community College setting. LAs develop a relationship with their faculty mentor and are embedded in the learning environment as they work with students in a collaborative atmosphere. LAs also lead study and review sessions for their students outside of class.

LAs are paid a stipend for assisting students for six hours per week during the semester.  
www.montgomerycollege.edu/LAProgram  
Learning Assistant Program Director:  
Dr. Carolyn Schick, STEM Faculty Advisor, Chemistry

**THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE MODEL**  
- Opportunities  
  - Focus on teaching provides high quality mentorship  
  - Students preparing to transfer can stay engaged in STEM  
  - Collaboration with other LA programs at four-year schools  

- Challenges  
  - Typical credit-based pedagogy course not optimal  
  - Smaller recruitment pool for upper level courses  
  - Obtaining grant funding and/or internal support

**ABOUT MONTGOMERY COLLEGE**  
- A three-campus community college founded in 1946, based outside of Washington, D.C.  
- One of the largest undergraduate institutions in Maryland, serving more than 63,000 students (including both credit and non-credit populations)  
- A diverse institution, with more than 160 countries represented and no majority race in the student population

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**LEARNING ASSISTANT OUTCOMES**  

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<tr>
<th>Student Impact</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
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<td>Increased student success and lower DFW rates in LA-supported STEM courses.</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
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<td>Positive student attitudes toward learning.</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
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**Faculty Impact**  
Increased collaborative learning and student engagement happen as faculty mentors embed LAs in their learning environments.

**Statement (student evaluations of LAs)**  
- The LA encouraged me to think. 96.7%  
- The LA encouraged me to participate and ask questions. 95.1%  
- I felt comfortable receiving support from the LA. 98.2%  
- I have learned more by having an LA in this course. 91.4%  
- The LA has increased my appreciation for the course material. 89.3%  
- The LA helped me succeed in this course. 96.5%

**Peer-modeling**  
- 60% of LAs are from under-represented minority (URM) groups  
- 50% of LAs were in an LA-supported class in a prior semester  
- 97% of LAs have a GPA of 3.1 or higher

**Mentorship**  
Some of my favorite moments with my LA were the long discussions we had that ranged from career paths, family, life adjustment process to living in the U.S., and social issues.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**  
With thanks to Brad Stewart, Vice President/Provost, Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus; Margaret Latimer, Vice President/Provost, Germantown Campus; Kimberly Kelley, Vice President/Provost, Rockville Campus; James Snipes, Dean of Chemical and Biological Sciences; John Hamman, Dean of Mathematics and Statistics; Muhammad Kehnamouyi, Dean of Science, Engineering and Technology; and Eric Benjamin, Dean of Education and Social Sciences.

**PERSPECTIVES**  

**Student Perspective:**  
“My LA was excited to teach and didn’t make work seem like a chore. She was easy and fun to talk to, and it made me feel comfortable to ask questions.”  
- student in class

**Learning Assistant Perspective:**  
“Working as an LA allowed me to grow as a person. I have greatly improved my communication skills and I created an amazing bond with my students. I have a deeper understanding of both chemistry and biology, and that will definitely help me in the future. I have learned that each student has their own way of understanding the material, and I am grateful that I am able to assist each and every one of them.”  
- former LA

**Faculty Mentor Perspective:**  
“Having an LA in the course created a strong sense of community among students and it was wonderful to watch the students learn from the experiences and knowledge of a peer mentor. It was a win-win situation for everyone. The LA’s guidance and support helped students increase their understanding of the course material while the LA strengthened her own knowledge and confidence by exploring the joys and challenges of teaching.”  
- Faculty Mentor

**LA Program Perspective:**  
“There are approximately 40 Learning Assistants at Montgomery College each semester in all disciplines of STEM. It’s inspiring to watch the LAs grow as they try on teaching, deepen their knowledge in STEM, build presentation and confidence skills, and form friendships with other LAs through dinner gatherings and training events. Each LA also paves the way for other students in the class to want to be an LA, getting more students excited about a future in STEM teaching. As embedded classroom support, the LAs help directly with student success in STEM classes at Montgomery College.”  
- LA Program Director