

MavPASS Leader – PHY211 - Leadership (Application)

I've always wondered how to share my knowledge with other students and fulfill my responsibility as a highly achieving university student. During my first semester, I heard about Maverick Peer-Facilitated Academic Support System (MavPASS) sessions offered in some introductory classes, but I was unfamiliar with the program. As the semester progressed, I learned that MavPASS is a program designed to help students in comprehending challenging course material through study sessions led by peers who have succeeded in the course. Knowing that attending the sessions wouldn't directly affect my own grades, since I was confident in my ability to excel through independent study, I then realized that this could be the opportunity I was seeking to support my fellow students.

After applying for the MavPASS leader position for the next Spring semester, I was fortunate to secure an interview. Although the interview went well, I was informed that the course I applied to facilitate, General Physics I, already had an experienced MavPASS leader who had been in the role for several semesters. Consequently, I was placed on the waitlist. Despite this setback, I remained determined and resolved to try again in the following semester. As anticipated, I was given the opportunity to become a MavPASS leader for PHY211 (Principle of Physics 1) in Fall 2023.

Prior to beginning our roles, we participated in two full days of mandatory training. These sessions provided us with the opportunity to meet our team coach and adopt our team's name, Marius Martians, in honor of our coach, Marius. During the training, I had the chance to interact with both new recruits and experienced MavPASS leaders. The training was concise and focused, which kept it engaging. It was impressively organized, with room and workshop topic changes every couple of hours.

Through this structured approach, I gained valuable insights into the MavPASS leader role. Initially, I thought it mainly involved lecturing, but I soon realized its primary focus is on facilitating the learning process.

During the training sessions, I observed various leadership styles and techniques employed by the experienced MavPASS leaders and the trainers themselves. Effective leaders actively listen to the concerns, ideas, and perspectives of their team members, communicate their expectations clearly, adapt their approach based on the needs of their team members, empower their team members, and lead by example. The leadership of Marius, our team coach, particularly stood out. His active listening, clear communication, and adaptability were evident throughout the training. He empowered us by providing valuable feedback and opportunities for growth, setting a remarkable example for the team. I aimed to apply these effective leadership qualities in my role as a MavPASS leader, and I believe I did my best.

As part of the MavPASS requirements, I had to promote my sessions. So, on the first day, I delivered a brief 3-minute speech, outlining the main benefits students could gain from attending my sessions. Afterward, I passed the stage back to the professor, hoping to attract enough interest. Deep down, I wasn't overly concerned about having a large turnout. Public speaking, especially to unfamiliar faces, always makes me a bit nervous.

Despite being an introvert, I had a goal to become a more confident and vocal leader. This first Mavpass session was a chance to break down that barrier. Nervousness hit me hard beforehand. I hadn't taught a class before, and the idea of leading a whole session felt overwhelming. An hour and fifteen minutes early, I found an empty classroom and started practicing. Even though I knew the material, words seemed to escape me every time I began. Taking a deep breath, I told myself, "Nati, you've got this!" Switching gears, I put on some music, relaxed for a bit, and decided to ditch the script. I'd go with the flow and trust my knowledge. This approach

worked wonders! The session went smoother than expected. With six students attending, it was a surprisingly strong turnout for the first week. It was a victory for both me and my goal of becoming a more extroverted leader.

After my first session my coach Marius provided valuable feedback to help me grow. He suggested I project my voice more, acknowledging it might be a cultural difference, and to work on allowing wait time after questions. As we learned in training, these pauses empower students to process information and find their own answers even though the silence might feel a bit awkward.

I took those pieces of advice into account and made efforts to improve on those areas. Additionally, I began experimenting with different methods of leading a session. One of the things I tried was incorporating a 2-minute music break between the session segments. To my delight, the students really enjoyed it, and it helped them refresh their minds, contributing to a more engaging and effective learning environment.

As the weeks progressed, I began to build a strong connection with the students. My exam review sessions attracted a growing number of attendees, with some regulars coming twice a week. They particularly enjoyed my icebreaker questions and the way I crafted practice problems. This, combined with the fact that most attendees performed well on the quizzes, led them to see the value in attending my sessions. Furthermore, my professor and I discussed offering extra credit for attending MavPASS sessions, with the amount awarded scaling based on attendance. This incentive further boosted participation.

Leadership, for me, has always been about continuous improvement. My experience as a MavPASS leader solidified that belief in a big way. At first, the idea of leading sessions alone made me a bit nervous. A smaller crowd felt way more manageable! However, my perspective shifted significantly over time. The more I led sessions, the more I craved sharing knowledge and fostering

a collaborative space where everyone thrived. Witnessing initially hesitant students evolve into confident, high-achieving participants was a testament to the power of continuous learning – not just for them, but for my own growth as a leader as well.

Integrity is another value I demonstrate as a MavPASS leader. I believe in being honest, transparent, and consistent in my actions, which has helped me gain the trust and respect of my students. I am very well known for keeping my word. If I say I will talk to the professor and come back to the next session with an answer, I will definitely do that. As a leader, I aim to embody these values and lead by example, creating a positive and supportive environment where everyone feels valued and motivated to succeed.

While I don't necessarily aspire to be a teacher, the leadership skills I developed, the interview practice I gained, and the exposure to a realistic work environment are all highly transferable. My time as a MavPASS leader particularly strengthened my abilities in time management, communication, and adaptability. Meeting deadlines was a crucial aspect of the role, as I had to submit email drafts and weekly lesson plans to my coach, ensuring timely communication and preparation for sessions. Attending weekly MavPASS leader meetings not only kept me up to date but also provided opportunities to learn new skills and techniques for enhancing session effectiveness. Additionally, receiving feedback on my sessions from my coach and peer mentors emphasized the importance of being open to constructive criticism and demonstrating progress over time.

Learning to approach individuals with different needs and preferences was another key takeaway. For instance, I encountered a student who preferred to work alone due to introversion; By talking with her directly and making sure everyone feels welcome, I created a supportive atmosphere where she felt valued. This showed how important it is to be understanding and

considerate in promoting teamwork and acceptance. Moreover, I witnessed my strengths in action, particularly as a Relator when assisting the student, and as a Learner when absorbing insights from feedback sessions, further reinforcing the value of my experiences as a MavPASS leader.

Looking ahead, I'm excited to apply the valuable skills and insights gained from this experience to my current on-campus jobs and upcoming summer internship. Whether it's managing time effectively, communicating with colleagues and supervisors, or adapting to new challenges, I'm confident that the lessons learned as a MavPASS leader will serve me well in any professional setting. Furthermore, I'm eagerly anticipating the opportunity to return as a MavPASS leader next semester, provided my schedule allows. Taking a break this semester due to scheduling conflicts, I'm already looking forward to rejoining the program and continuing to make a positive impact on my peers' academic journeys.