PLA Effectiveness in WPI Calculus Courses:
Can a Weekly Meeting Help?
Julia Gavelek (BME), Nikki Goldman (IMGD), Julia Rivelli (AE), Alexis Varada (MA)
Advisors: Professor Joseph Beck (CS), Dr. Robert Traver (US)
PLA: Carolyn Detora (ME)

Problem
Peer Learning Assistants (PLAs) vary in how they conduct conferences. This variation affects student performance in calculus.

Solution
To implement weekly meetings between professors and their PLAs. These cover core objectives, soft skills & grading techniques.

Conclusion
Professors & PLAs noticed better communication after a weekly meeting. Students observed little change in PLA teaching methods.

Interviews
- Conducted with professors, PLAs, and Morgan Learning Center staff

Weekly Meeting
- Provided tailored, organized agenda to each professor & set of PLAs

Post Survey
- Distributed after conference to professors, PLAs, and students

Change in Effective Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior Weekly Meetings?</th>
<th># of PLAs</th>
<th># of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calculus II Professor</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculus III Professor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculus IV Professor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a student, my PLA...
“...went over the material with more depth and clarity than before.”
“...seemed more focused on pacing and student participation.”

As a PLA...
“...the meetings helped me keep track of my habits and effectively plan.”
“...I was able to recognize and fix my mistakes.”

As a professor...
“...I like the personal interaction while we clarified and discussed potential problems.”
“...regular meetings are crucial.”

Acknowledgements
Thank you to the WPI professors, PLAs, faculty, and students who participated in our study.

Quotes anonymously sourced from surveys distributed to WPI professors, Peer Learning Assistants, and students.