



**Talent is evenly distributed.  
Opportunity is not.  
We exist to change that.**



# **The Power of Near-Peer Instruction**

**How NEON Teaching Fellows Can Transform Next Generation Early Colleges Outline**

# Presenters



**Dr. Lisle  
Smart**

Director of School  
Opportunity

National Education  
Opportunity Network



**Mr. Shawn  
Brooks-Fletcher**

Teaching Fellow

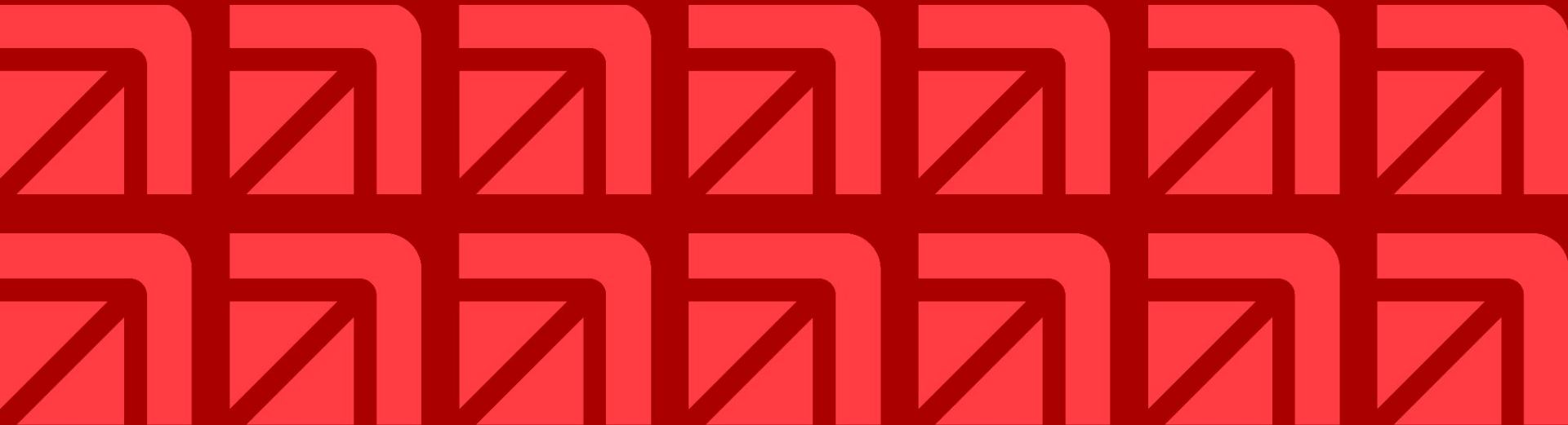
Morehouse College  
Alumnus 23'



## Who's in the room?

Please join by scanning the QR code.

# National Education Opportunity Network



With our network of colleges and universities, we deliver and support college credit-bearing courses into low-income (Title 1) high schools — at scale, and at no cost to students.

---



“I didn’t think of myself as college material. Now look at me...graduating SUNY Buffalo with a 3.7 GPA, full scholarship and an engineering career.”

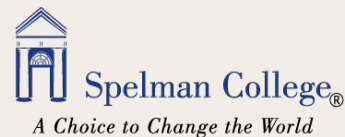
**Donovan Blount**

*SUNY Buffalo, '25*

Queens, N.Y.

FEATURED IN **The New York Times**

# Our College & University Partners



# Our Model



1

**College  
Credit-Bearing  
Courses  
from Top Colleges  
and Universities**



2

**University  
Teaching Fellows**



3

**Classroom  
Co-Teachers**



4

**Supports &  
Community**



# Serving a diverse set of Title I schools & districts



**34**

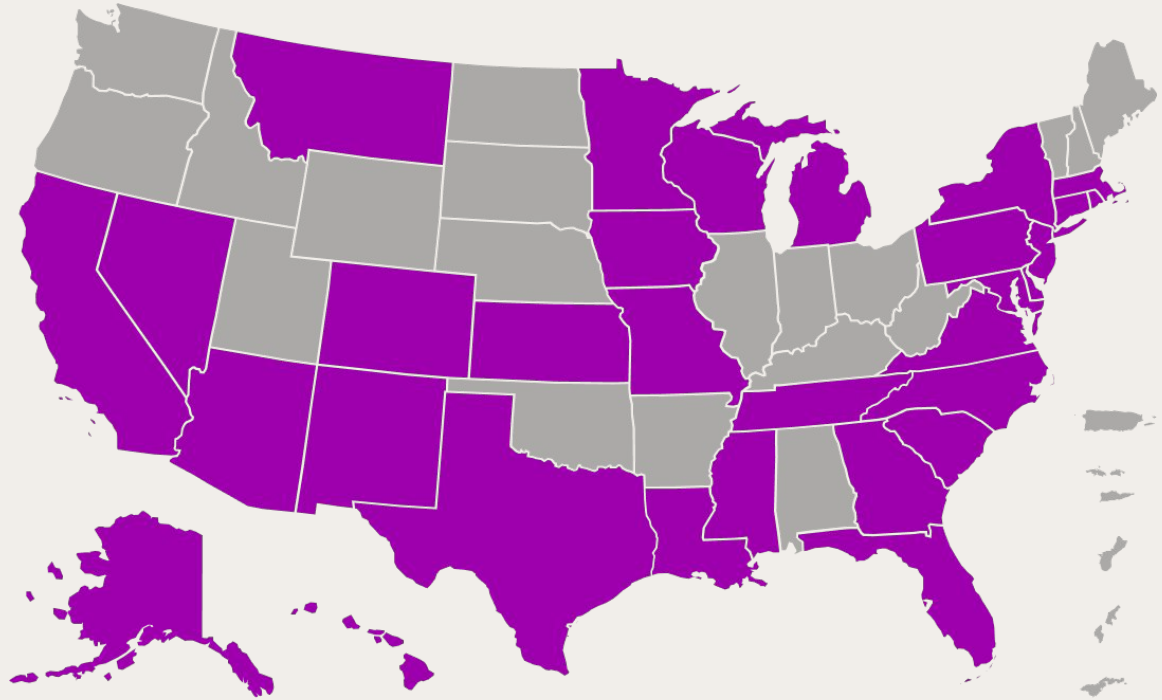
States in 190+ cities  
and expanding

**500+**

High schools  
accelerating opportunity

**50K+**

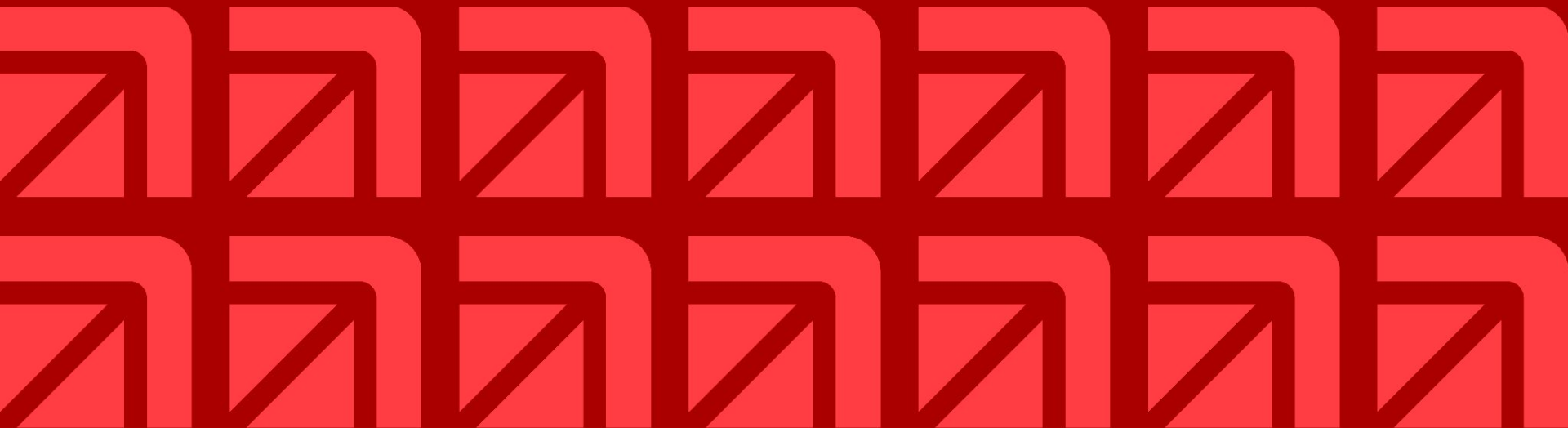
Scholars on track to  
the American Dream





**What do students need beyond content mastery to succeed in college-level work?**

# NEON Teaching Fellow Model



# Who are NEON Teaching Fellows?



1

## National Education Opportunity Network Staff

- Lead pre-course preparation
- Communicate student performance updates
- Provide course implementation supports



2

## University Teaching Fellows

- Grade all assignments
- Facilitate synchronous, small group instruction with students
- Provide additional content support



3

## High School Co-Teachers

- Deliver college class in high school setting
- Track student performance and engagement

**College Level Academic Rigor**

# BEFORE Instruction

*Preparation that sets every session up for success*

**01 Review Course Materials**  
Review faculty-designed syllabi, assignments, and assessments before each session

**02 Align Recitation Plans**  
Align weekly recitation plans with asynchronous college lectures to bridge content

**03 Coordinate with Team**  
Coordinate with faculty and NEON staff to anticipate and address student challenges

**04 Prepare Scaffolds**  
Prepare scaffolds, examples, and discussion prompts rooted in college expectations

# DURING Instruction

*Leading the weekly synchronous recitation session*

# 45

minutes

**Weekly Zoom  
Recitation Session**

01 Lead weekly synchronous recitation sessions (ex: 45-min Zoom)

02 Facilitate small-group discussions: application, analysis, synthesis

03 Reinforce key concepts while modeling college-level thinking and habits

04 Normalize help-seeking, productive struggle, and academic risk-taking

# AFTER Instruction

*Closing the loop – feedback, follow-up, and communication*

01

## **Grade & Provide Feedback**

Grade assignments and provide timely, actionable feedback (as designated by faculty)

02

## **Monitor Student Progress**

Monitor student progress and flag early warning indicators before challenges escalate

03

## **Individual Follow-Up**

Follow up with students individually or in small groups as needed to address gaps

04

## **Communicate Trends**

Communicate trends and insights to NEON staff and school partners for continuous improvement

# The Instructional Cycle

*Teaching Fellows operate in a continuous loop – preparation, presence, and follow-through.*

## BEFORE

- › Review syllabi & materials
- › Align recitation plans
- › Coordinate with faculty & staff
- › Prepare scaffolds & prompts

## DURING

- › Lead Zoom recitation sessions
- › Facilitate small-group work
- › Model college-level thinking
- › Normalize productive struggle

## AFTER

- › Grade & give feedback
- › Monitor for warning signs
- › Follow up 1:1 or in groups
- › Report trends to NEON & partners

**Consistency across all three phases is what drives student success.**

# How Teaching Fellows Differ From Other Roles



# How Teaching Fellows Differ From Other Roles

## Not the Instructor of Record

- Do not design curriculum or set academic standards
- Faculty retain full authority over course content, grading policies, and outcomes

## Not a Traditional Teaching Assistant

- Not supporting additional on-campus college students
- Embedded in a high school context with a dual focus on access and rigor

## Not Solely a Tutor or Mentor

- Instruction is proactive and embedded, not reactive or optional
- Integrates academic instruction with coaching on college success skills

## Instructional & Student Support Functions

Small-group academic instruction · Structured office hours & academic coaching · Time management ·  
College assignment navigation · Academic confidence

# Not Solely a Tutor or Mentor



## **Reactive → Proactive**

Tutoring is optional and responsive. Teaching Fellows proactively structure academic instruction – it's embedded in the model, not an add-on.



## **Optional → Embedded**

Students don't have to seek out support. Fellows are an integrated part of the academic experience, creating consistent engagement.



## **Academic + College Success**

Instruction is not limited to subject content only. Fellows weave in coaching on college-level expectations, persistence, and academic identity.

# Instructional & Student Support Functions

## INSTRUCTIONAL

- Small-group academic instruction aligned to college coursework
- Structures office hours target academic coaching (where applicable)
- Proactive – not waiting for student to struggle

## STUDENT SUPPORT

- Time management and workload planning
- Navigating college-level assignments and expectations
- Academic confidence and persistence
- Serve as relatable role model who demystify college pathways

# Blending Asynchronous and Synchronous Learning



# Blending Asynchronous and Synchronous Learning

## ASYNCHRONOUS

- College lectures and readings
- Faculty-designed assessments and exams
- Teaching Fellows prepare students to engage meaningfully with async content

## SYNCHRONOUS

- Weekly sessions: clarify complex concepts
- Apply content through discussion and practice
- Connect coursework to real-world and postsecondary contexts

*This structure mirrors authentic college learning while adding intentional scaffolding.*

# Why Near Peer Instruction Works in Early College Settings



# Why Near-Peer Instruction Works in Early College

↓ **Psychological Distance**

Reduces the gap between students and college expectations through relatable role models

↑ **College-Going Identity**

Strengthens belief that college is attainable through consistent near-peer connection

↑ **Completion & Persistence**

Supports high completion rates without lowering academic standards

## **Aligns with Next Generation Early College Priorities:**

Student-Centered Instruction  
Integrated Academic & Social Supports  
Strong, Reciprocal IHE Partnerships

# Impact Beyond Students Served



### Energizing teacher leaders.

7 out of 10 teachers reported teaching with NEON increased their enjoyment and satisfaction with teaching.

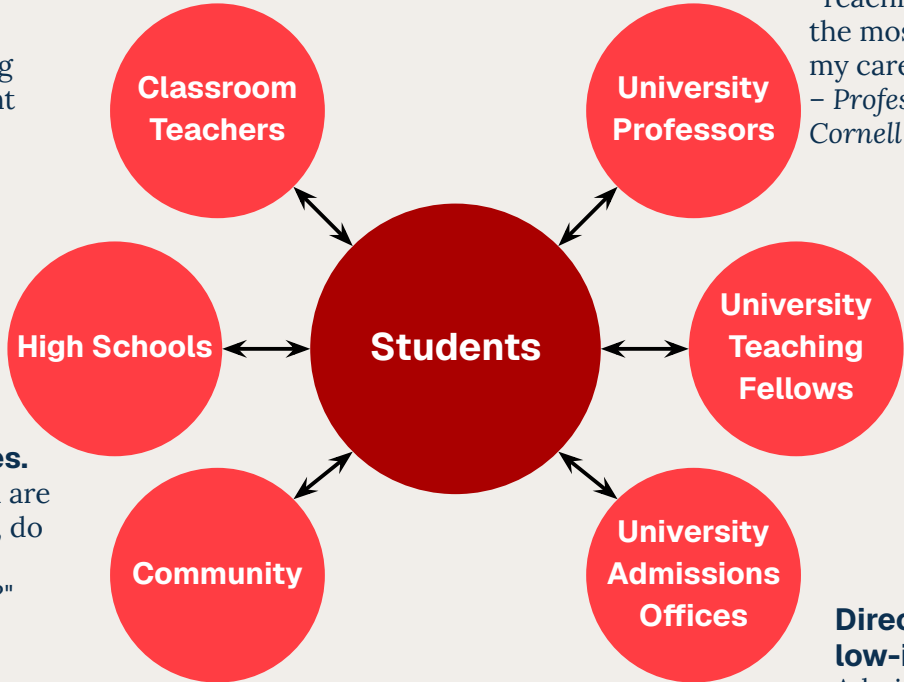
"This was my best teaching experience ever; it also opened my eyes to what my students were capable of."

- Danielle Perez, Homestead, FL  
Co-Teacher

### Transforming high school cultures.

"People think kids in my high school are more likely to go to jail than college, do you know what it means to have Harvard and Stanford in our school?"

- Sammar Parham, Sophomore,  
Washington University in St. Louis



**Building college-going community and belonging.** Virtual opening and closing ceremonies invite parents and siblings in to celebrate their scholars' success.

### Positively impacting faculty.

"Teaching with the [NEON] has been the most impactful thing I've done in my career."

- Professor Todd Cowen,  
Cornell University

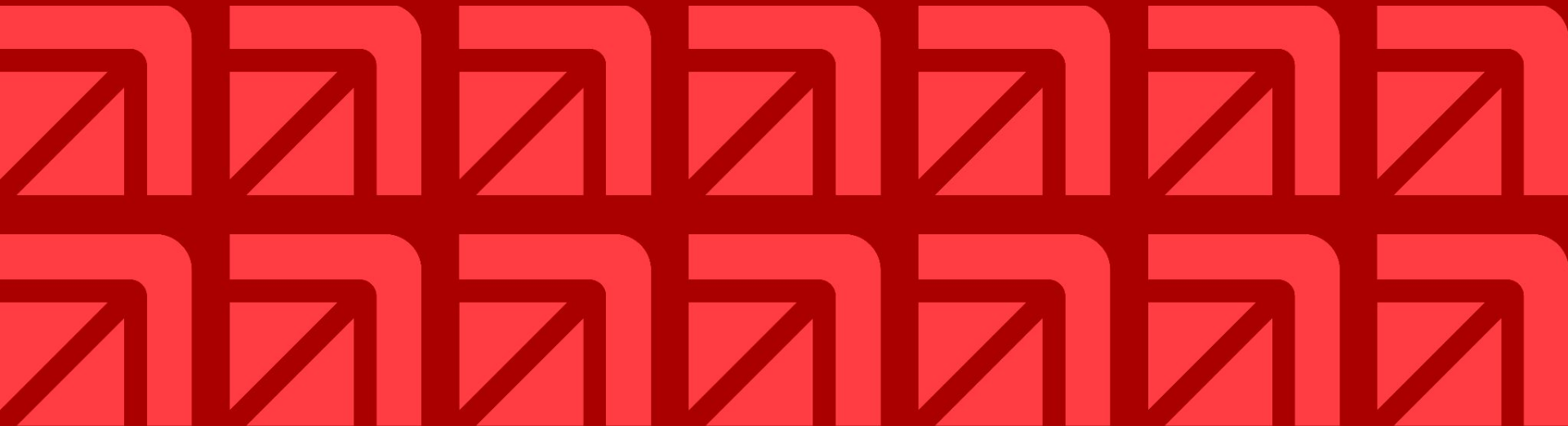
### Engaging graduates and undergraduates in teaching the next generation of college-goers.

95% of Teaching Fellows reported that they grew from being a Teaching Fellow for a course.

### Direct access to scholars from low-income Title 1 communities.

Admissions offices get a new metric for identifying talent nationwide.

# Reflection, Discussion, & Evaluation



# Reflection, Discussion & Evaluation

5–10 minutes · Lisle & Shawn

## Guided Reflection

*"Where could near-peer instruction strengthen your current Early College model?"*

## What's Next

- Open Q&A
- Session evaluation
- Closing takeaways



# Thank You

Learn more about us at [neonopportunity.org](https://neonopportunity.org)  
For school partnerships please book time with Dr. Smart

