

Abstract Submitted  
for the TSF12 Meeting of  
The American Physical Society

**Understanding the Learning Assistant experience with Physics Identity and Community of Practice** ELEANOR CLOSE, HUNTER CLOSE, DAVID DONNELLY, Texas State University-San Marcos — Learning Assistants (LAs) have been shown to have better conceptual understanding and more favorable beliefs about science than non-LAs, and are more likely to choose a career in K-12 science teaching [1]. We propose that connections between elements of identity, persistence, and participation in an LA program can be explained using the concept of the community of practice and its intimate relationship to identity [2]. In separate work, Hazari et al. found that physics identity was highly correlated to expressed career plans in physics [3]. We hypothesize that a thriving LA program has many features of a well-functioning community of practice and contributes to all four elements of physics identity: personal interest, student performance, competence, and recognition by others. We explore how this analysis of the LA experience might shape decisions and influence outcomes of adoption and adaptations of the LA model.

[1] Otero, Pollock, & Finkelstein, *Am. J. Phys.* 78 (11), 1218-1224 (2010).

[2] Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998).

[3] *J. Res. Sci. Teach.* 47 (8), 978-1003 (2010).

Eleanor Close  
Texas State University-San Marcos

Date submitted: 21 Sep 2012

Electronic form version 1.4