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ASSOCIATION

NCLCA

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About *The Learning Assistance Review*

The Learning Assistance Review is an official publication of the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA). NCLCA serves faculty, staff, and students in the field of learning assistance at two- and four-year colleges, vocational and technical schools, and universities. All material published by *The Learning Assistance Review* is copyrighted by NCLCA and can be used only upon expressed written permission.

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NCLCA's Definition of a Learning Center

The National College Learning Center Association defines a learning center at institutions of higher education as interactive academic spaces which exist to reinforce and extend student learning in physical and/or virtual environments. A variety of comprehensive support services and programs are offered in these environments to enhance student academic success, retention, and completion rates by applying best practices, student learning theory, and addressing student-learning needs from multiple pedagogical perspectives. Staffed by professionals, paraprofessionals, faculty, and/or trained student educators, learning centers are designed to reinforce the holistic academic growth of students by fostering critical thinking, metacognitive development, and academic and personal success.

Rising to the Challenge

The COVID-19 crisis affected higher education and changed how we operated starting in March of 2020, forcing learning center leaders to develop new ways to reach students and support their college communities. The coronavirus continued to challenge them during summer and fall semesters.

The National College Learning Center Association is a community that works and supports learning center leaders across the world. Although someone wiser than us once said, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” that statement indicates we’re resting on our laurels.

We shouldn’t. Higher education is always changing.

These are the stories of how 48 learning centers addressed the fluid situation in order to serve their students.

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Letter from the Editor

By Michael Frizell, MFA

Editor, *The Learning Assistance Review*

We didn't plan for a pandemic, and we certainly never dreamed the spring 2020 semester would end the way it did. But that doesn't mean we didn't roll up our sleeves and accomplish the impossible in a record amount of time.

Learning center professionals nimbly navigated new waters as they asked themselves a seemingly simple question:

How do we educate and support our students using alternative means now that the university has closed its doors?

"Move online," a simple answer to this question, while easy for faculty who teach primarily course management systems, proved complex for some college and university units. It meant setting up training, creating clear instructions, testing newly-developed procedures, researching new approaches, fundamentally rethinking traditional models, and crafting a communication and marketing plan to reach constituents.

Just a few weeks ago, popping into someone's office to discuss coordination between units took a few minutes after dispensing pleasantries while drinking coffee. Almost

overnight, we had to rely on home internet with sometimes-shaky connections, digital forms of communication we learned on the fly, and watching YouTube videos on how to run conferencing platforms moments before we signed into one. We had to bring our work home, blurring the separation between our public and private lives. It pushed the edges of our creativity and ingenuity.

And we accomplished it in less than two weeks.

We asked our students to be patient with us. Many of us aren't as adept as they are online. I can barely read Twitter, don't have an Instagram account, and have had to research the origin of some memes just to get the joke. When someone says, "Tik Tok," I look at my wristwatch. These are unprecedented times, and we needed their help.

We needed them to meet us halfway.

We needed them to understand that we just built the access service they're working on last week while listening to the news and worrying about where we'll purchase toilet paper.

We downloaded the wrong video by accident, screwed up some of the narration on our slapdash PowerPoint presentations, and took our time when responding to emails because we were busy checking our sentences for nuances that might misconstrue our meaning.

We misspelled a few things, got the dates wrong because we're using a now-outdated syllabus, schedule, or training

sequence that took us months to craft. We grew frustrated at our inability to return work in a reasonable amount of time.

Our pets were overjoyed that we spent so much time at home and just wanted to step on our keyboards and lick our faces. I suspect many of our cats and dogs were internet famous by the end of the semester.

At Missouri State University, I asked our students to think about the following things:

- **You can't read tone into an online conversation.** Although we love to use sarcasm and humor in online environments, and you may be tempted to crack a joke, avoid it. It's easy to misconstrue meaning and offend someone. Read your emails or comments before you click send and save us all the trouble of trying to figure out what you meant.
- **Keep in contact with your professors.** Your teachers are experts in their fields, but many of us are treading new waters, just like you. If you suddenly stop communicating, how will they know when you need help? Remember this essential study skill above all else: It's hard to flunk somebody you like. They'll work with you. Let them.
- **Be professional.** You're in a professional setting, even if our cats suddenly show up on Zoom. Address other students with respect. If you communicate through

the written word, use proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Cute emojis are out. Sorry.

- **Ask questions.** There's no need to apologize. If you don't understand something, ask, but be respectful, too. If you're working on an assignment at 2 a.m. and get stuck, don't expect an answer at 2:15 a.m.
- **Don't procrastinate.** If you were already a chronic procrastinator, imagine what it will be like taking your classes from the comfort of the beanbag chair in your old room at your parent's house while dressed in your most comfortable jammies and eating Funyuns. Hold yourself accountable.
- **Treat this online course as a seated course.** Yeah, I get it. That's easier said than done. You can tune us out simply by clicking the power button on your computer. Set up your online classroom in a dedicated space instead of in front of the television or Xbox.
- **Take exercise breaks, too.** You learn better in an aerobically fit body. More exercise means more oxygen to your brain. That means better recall of information when you need it during high-stress situations. If you think the "freshman fifteen" is a real phenomenon, just wait until you're sitting in front of a keyboard for six to eight weeks. Those sweats fit, but will your jeans?

- **Use campus resources.** The staff of these offices and units have worked tirelessly to ensure a seamless transition for you. Bookmark their websites and check them for updates. You'll be glad you did.

Students nationwide were overjoyed to discover that their teachers worked with them, essential support services are there when they needed them, and that we understood what they were going through, too.

As college leadership focused on the health and safety of their campus communities, monitoring official news and discussing strategies for reopening in the fall, learning center professionals were doing what they always do. They stepped up. They innovated. They maintained that often tenuous connections between faculty and student expectations. They felt like they were holding their centers together through sheer force of will.

How'd they do it?

You'll find their stories here. We learn from each other. Enjoy.

Curs'ed COVID-19 Limerick

By Regina Mason

South Texas College's Nursing and Allied Health Campus

The Pandemic caused chaos and shambles,
Our tutors were amiss in their scrambles.
They took it online and life would seem fine,
For students who heard the preambles.

We searched for the lost and needy,
Those who lacked the internet speedy,
With computers we gave,
the class could be saved
And we communicated great using EDI.

We fought to build resources online,
With hours of toil and wine,
Through trial and error,
We fought through the terror
And victoriously started to shine.

This tale is far from its end,
Tutoring is steadily paced on the mend.
We look forward to the fall,
And the answer to call,
for the struggles we soon must contend.

Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center Strategies for Dealing with Unprecedented Change during COVID-19

**By Geoff Bailey, Ph.D.
Current NCLCA President
University of Louisville**

I have found that learning center (LC) professionals are among some of the most flexible and agile employees in postsecondary education. The nature of our work in providing critical academic support requires us to be. Specifically, the customer-service mindsets of our key stakeholders (students and parents) and institutional expectations to drive critical student success metrics based on data-informed results necessitate a willingness and a need to embrace change as well as adaptability in how we provide services. One notable CEO (Kamsickas, 2018) encapsulated such agility in three guiding principles for his company that have direct applicability to our profession: 1) view change as an opportunity rather than a problem; 2) a clear vision for your people facilitates confidence in their work; and 3) our industry should embrace an engaged workforce in decision-making and distributed ownership. This wisdom is proving more crucial than ever given the rapid rate of change in our society, particularly in terms of technology, and reducing the outdated model of a top-down hierarchy that can limit innovation and “buy-in” from front-line personnel.

Arguably, the last decade has seen some of the most transformative changes in the learning center environment, particularly as technology has evolved to facilitate online interactions as well as in-person. One could look no further than at the landscape and number of outside vendors that have emerged during this period to help support the delivery of academic support and instructional services to understand what I mean. Moreover, significant innovation has occurred internally at LC's as a new generation of young professionals brings their creativity and tech-savvy nature to bear on transforming everything from administrative processes to data collection and analysis to service delivery. For example, the ability to utilize tools like Microsoft (MS) Flow to automate administrative processes between MS products helps reduce the labor-intensive nature of such as making tutoring assignments, reviewing employment applications, scheduling candidate interviews, and conducting student surveys and paraprofessional staff evaluations.

Additionally, large-scale institutional purchases or internal development of data analytics platforms enable LC professionals to examine the student body to find trends in participant and non-participant academic performance, address concerns about gatekeeper courses and mass instructional methods, and disaggregate student data to better understand the academic performance of key populations such as those who are underserved, underfinanced, and underperforming.

Collectively, the innovative mindsets of LC professionals, the fluid nature of students' academic needs and preparation,

the rapidly evolving technology that enables us to leverage data and facilitate services, and the increasing expectation that learning center services will positively impact critical measures related to student learning, retention rates, and graduation rates have resulted in a rapid expansion of the number of students served and courses being supported on campuses nationwide. For example, at my learning center at the University of Louisville, REACH (Resources for Academic Achievement) provides tutoring support for over 4,500 unique students annually across 130+ different courses, which significantly contributes to the 80,000+ hours of academic support and instruction we offer. We have also been recognized for closing the achievement gap in mathematics between African-American and Caucasian students; both pass our co-requisite, intervention math courses at a 73% rate.

Our attributes and successes were put to the proverbial test in mid-March 2020. The worldwide pandemic (COVID-19), caused by the novel coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2, resulted in an unprecedented shift in our societies, and higher education was not immune from the physical shutdowns that characterized our response to mitigate the transmission rates of the virus. Yet, I would argue that the nature of our work in learning centers coupled with our agility, creativity, and innovative mindsets were the keys to our Herculean shift in providing the nearly seamless delivery of all of our services and academic support/instruction through online platforms within a matter of days. Many LC's nationwide have offered online instruction and academic support for years; others are

newer to the game. Yet, despite our relative experience in the online domain, we all had one thing in common – we had no choice. And, that necessity to change revealed that LC professionals were more adept at doing so compared to other segments of higher education. This does not infer that it happened without significant stress, exhaustive hours, or that we did so perfectly. However, we did display phenomenal agility and a commitment to honoring our call to serve students the best way we could and to minimize students’ fears and apprehension of how the semester would unfold, the uncertainty of faculty expectations, and – in many cases – unfamiliarity with the mechanics of engaging in or maximizing the online platforms available to us.

Only now, as we begin to take stock of where we have been for the last few months, do the puzzle pieces seem to coalesce in defining the picture. As a learning center Director, one of the most essential things I can do is listen to my front line staff who are intimately familiar with our operations, our capacity, our limitations, and where the potential lies. Their experience and realistic assessment of our capabilities enabled our center to pivot rapidly. Fortunately, we already had solid experience employing two online platforms, which facilitated our rapid response to meet our students’ academic needs. Yet, like most learning centers, we had never delivered our services on a widespread scale let alone shifted gears in such a condensed timeframe. Our conversations revealed the need for comprehensive training for ourselves, our tutors, and our graduate assistants. It also required the development of new resources to help support our students, who almost

universally lacked experience with the online experience. We also discovered that our logistics needed to evolve as they related to scheduled appointments, tracking student hours, exporting data to our tutor management system, and adjusting drop-in tutoring schedules to more efficiently maximize our remaining budget.

This reflection period has been more than an internal exercise, though. The field of learning assistance embodies a culture of sharing knowledge and experience, which includes successes as well as failures. It includes exploration of ideas, logistics, and pedagogies that facilitate adaptation on an individual campus as well as for the broader higher education landscape. Throughout the spring semester and into the summer of 2020, it was remarkable to see the variety of professional exchanges that manifested around our common goal of pivoting services to an online environment. Notably, NCLCA responded quickly to a member's idea of hosting synchronous, weekly discussion forums to address our shared reality. Members discussed numerous topics including an analysis of online modalities, tutoring methods for synchronous versus asynchronous exchanges, vendor options, programmatic shifts for summer services, and safety protocols for an eventual return to our physical campuses. These were considered so valuable that NCLCA continued to sponsor these on a monthly basis, from June 2020 onward, and have branded them the M3 series (monthly membership meetings). Additionally, NCLCA began offering vendor-sponsored webinars for free to members. These webinars enabled

companies who serve the learning assistance field to model their platforms, discuss key features, promote opportunities for free trials in response to the rapid online surge, and answer LC professionals' questions. In August 2020, NCLCA launched our new, monthly podcast series to explore critical questions and issues in our field such as our shift to online support. Last, but certainly not least, are valuable conversations and exchanges through the LRNASST listserv and access to the vast array of LSCHE (Learning Support Centers in Higher Education) resources offered on their website (LSCHE, 2020).

During the transition to summer services and our annual planning phase for the upcoming academic year, there are several critical recommendations I proffer for learning center professionals nationwide: 1) develop greater infrastructure to support our shift to online programs; 2) understand how your institution and faculty will pivot their delivery of the academic curriculum; 3) redesign your marketing of services and academic support to personalize the messaging for incoming and returning students; and 4) coordinate your efforts for a hybrid or "hyflex" return in the fall semester with your campus partners that takes into consideration the unique interactions occurring in a learning center environment.

Several reasons developing greater infrastructure for our online platforms will be relevant for the foreseeable future. First, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over and will necessitate a fluid response on the delivery of academic curricula and support services. Second, campuses that witness a physical return in the fall will undoubtedly alter which

courses and services can safely meet in person, which will necessitate ongoing online support. Third, emerging safety protocols based on scientific evidence, epidemiological recommendations, and state/federal guidelines will reduce the size of group tutoring sessions, Supplemental Instruction, and Peer Assisted Learning. Fourth, it is essential to build upon our online service delivery by crafting better instructions, guidelines, and policies for our stakeholders (students, tutors, campus partners, and faculty). In this respect, being proactive and transparent with our messaging will reduce confusion and frustration, as well as facilitate a greater likelihood of participation in academic support that will foster the achievement of critical student success measures.

Exploring this further, there are several critical considerations that LC professionals would benefit from in solidifying this infrastructure. Although you may have made a successful transition to a campus-based platform for online engagement this past spring, it will be critical to evaluate whether it meets your students' needs in a tutoring or academic coaching environment. As with any technology, it is beneficial to conduct a cost-benefit analysis on whether the existing technology offers the features you need to operate your services efficiently and effectively. If you determine that the existing platform does not, what other options are available at the institution versus the benefits offered by outside vendors? Additional questions to address include:

- Does the online platform work across devices (e.g., PC, Mac, tablet)?

- Are web-based services seamless across different internet browsers?
- Does the technology have to go through a campus VPN (virtual private network) or LDAP authentication to ensure security protocols? Does this impact any of the operational features?
- Are there fully-functional “apps” available for students to use the technology?
- Does the platform enable data tracking of student visits, hours, and appointments?
- Does the platform enable tracking of tutor hours for payroll purposes? Or, do you need to maintain separate systems?

Many companies offer free trial versions of their platforms to help you determine the appropriate fit for your center, often with the hope that they will pique your interest enough to sign a longer-term contract. The drawback is the potential cost inherent in such purchases; the upside is the customization geared towards learning center environments.

Moreover, refining your instructions, guidelines, and protocols for students and staff will reduce the proclivity of misunderstandings about how to connect for online services, coaching, meetings, and supervisory sessions. This can be supplemented with instructional videos on how to use key features of your online platform. Fortunately, many vendors have already produced such videos, which means not having to recreate the proverbial wheel. LC staff can also offer synchronous opportunities to demonstrate key features to

students and staff and allow them to test out features in a “sandbox” environment. LC personnel will also want to ensure that the messaging to students is consistent across modalities (e.g., emails, websites, social media, etc.).

Next, it is essential to understand how your institution and faculty will pivot their educational delivery (in-person, online, hybrid, etc.) as we prepare for the fall semester. Doing so helps learning center staff determine the best format(s) for supporting students and addressing potential gaps or concerns about the curricular delivery. Where possible, ask to be included on campus committees that will develop recommendations regarding in-person versus online instructional delivery and the types of courses associated with each. It will also be helpful to consider the available space on campus where tutoring can be conducted safely in-person and the maximum seating capacity that will be allowed.

Conceivably, larger courses and LC services, such as PAL and SI, may be required to meet online to ensure health and safety. This has additional implications for training tutors and other peer leaders as well as discussing specific adjustments to PAL or SI with faculty partners. Moreover, it will be crucial to communicate early and frequently with all faculty partners about the type of academic support students can receive for their classes and where this information will be centralized (e.g., LC website, Blackboard course shells, faculty syllabi, etc.). Lastly, LC personnel often hold significant insights into students’ mindsets. Consider your campus population, their receptivity and willingness to embrace change (especially for

returners), how you can help students adjust to required changes so they do not feel overwhelmed, their experience with recent online platforms and support (and recommendations on what may make the interactions better), and their perceptions and fears about COVID-19 as it relates to attending academic support sessions and meetings.

From there, it is critical to redesign how you are marketing your services and programs to both new and returning students. We do not have the luxury of simply doing what we have done in the past. Instead, consider how your messaging might be customized for different student populations. For example, what do incoming students need to know that might be different from your returning student population? What is the best method(s) for conveying this information? Have you mapped out a timeline for the summer and fall semester regarding when messages will be disseminated and the platform being used? Moreover, reinforcing institutional messaging as it applies to expectations around safety will be essential for ensuring consistency. Given the legitimate concerns around safety and the uncertainty of where institutions and communities will be in reducing transmission rates of COVID-19, it will be important to emphasize the balance of safety with the high-quality service your learning center offers rather than simply trying to “normalize” fears and factors we cannot control. Finding ways to demonstrate the relative ease of using online platforms for academic support will be particularly helpful in reducing students’ apprehensions about continuing or using online platforms for academic support.

Relatedly, since students will be registering for services virtually rather than in person (especially for summer and most likely continuing into fall), it will be essential that the process is simple and streamlined. Removing unnecessary barriers, such as requests for demographic information that can be pulled from your campus SIS, will help confer the simplicity and ease of requesting academic support. And, with summer orientation moving online for most campuses, leveraging opportunities to introduce new students to your services and the request process will help ensure a smoother start in the fall semester. LC professionals should identify key partners on campus who can assist and/or reinforce messaging to your student populations, including Admissions, Orientation, academic advisors, faculty partners, the Counseling Center, Student Affairs, Student Government Association, and Faculty and Staff Senates, to name a few. Wherever possible, it is prudent to keep the messaging consistent so that confusion and errors are avoided, especially if such messaging goes out over different modalities.

As an example, REACH provided critical information about our academic support services as well as a brief video testimonial about tutoring for inclusion in the university's online orientation modules (Comevo). We linked this content to our webpage and designated an "orientation" section under our Resources tab to spotlight similar content and key statistics on how our services help participants excel academically. We also developed ADA-compliant electronic brochures about our services as well as our summer math

programs. These are available through our website, through our social media platforms, via the Undergraduate Admissions website, and through Slate messaging to key populations who will benefit from the opportunity to participate (e.g., students identified as being underprepared in mathematics). Additionally, we reinforced our messaging and summer program offerings with campus advisors who had one of..." "In doing so, they could reinforce and promote opportunities for our services.

The other essential marketing tool to evaluate is your LC's website. Although some centers may rely on external professionals (either on campus or outside companies) to develop critical updates, it is still advisable to review the content, functionality, and user-friendliness of your site in preparation for additional changes due to COVID-19. Ideally, having the technical expertise among your staff to make changes can help expedite matters, particularly during times like these when changes seem to come frequently. Although the timing of major website revisions is never easy to determine, REACH decided to bump our timeframe for an overhaul from May 1 to spring break once we learned about the impending campus closure. We had already been making upgrades behind the scenes and testing out the functionality. Based on what we were learning about our new reality, it became critical for us to make the conversion early. Doing so enabled us to make rapid changes to the site, particularly as new information has been released by our university. Other benefits included: streamlining critical functionality like our consolidated service request page; creating new pages

dedicated to COVID-19 information, orientation, a consolidated summer request page, and new placement test information, to name a few; and linking our social media feeds to our website, which further streamlines our messaging and emphasizes consistency.

Finally, your LC must have a role in developing protocols and procedures to facilitate a hybrid or HyFlex return for fall. For those unfamiliar with the term, HyFlex refers to the flexible structure that offers students the choice of attending face-to-face classes or engaging in online, synchronous platforms (Educause, 2010; Maloney & Kim, 2020; Miller, Risser, & Griffiths, 2013). The model also enables instruction to become hybrid, where students may attend class in-person on certain days and complete online instruction on other days (Educause, 2010; Maloney & Kim, 2020). Given the robust technology now available to learning center personnel, the same flexibility exists to deliver essential academic support services and instruction to augment the curriculum. For example, LCs may record or stream large group support, such as PAL or SI, to accommodate students whose schedules preclude attending in person, where safety protocols reduce the seating capacity of in-person attendance, or where students may not feel safe attending in person due to health concerns. Online storage of videos through the institution's LMS (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas) or free online sites (e.g., YouTube) facilitate universal access and preclude the need for additional server storage. Similarly, LCs who provide course instruction such as co-requisite and intervention courses can

utilize a HyFlex model, which helps ensure social distancing guidelines.

The development of protocols and procedures should be coordinated with other campus officials whose focus is on student services (as opposed to ones solely focused on the classroom environment), thereby ensuring that the unique environment and student interactions that occur in a learning center are taken into consideration proactively. LC staff should be prepared to advocate for flexible space utilization as well as equipment that helps protect people's health and psychological need for safety. Relatedly, one of the primary concerns expressed during the weekly, synchronous discussions with the NCLCA membership revolved around strategies and equipment to help ensure a safe return to campus in the fall. These conversations emphasized both practical and logistical considerations for protecting students and staff. Examples included:

- Evaluating which services can be conducted safely in-person versus continuing online (e.g., PAL, SI);
- Evaluating square footage to determine appropriate seating capacity and occupancy levels that ensure social distancing guidelines;
- Ensuring physical equipment/barriers and PPE essential for protecting health and safety of staff and students (e.g., plexiglass shields, masks, gloves, sanitizer; foot pulls for doors vs propping; moving furniture/chairs or demarcating specific seating to ensure social distancing upon physical return)

- Training all staff on institutional protocols and policies, including appropriate use of PPE;
- Continuing to leverage technology for conducting meetings (especially ones where the physical space might violate social distancing guidelines), large course support, summer programs, and online intervention courses;
- Verifying campus policies for dealing with students who do not comply with safety protocols;
- Ensuring staff are knowledgeable and trained on how to deescalate situations involving non-compliant students; and
- Ensuring cleaning protocols for the LC (e.g., high-contact surfaces, keyboards, and other electronic equipment, dry erase markers, doorknobs, etc.) that delineate frequency of cleaning and sanitization as well as the responsible party.

The implementation of such guidelines to protect students and staff should be based on the evolving recommendations from health officials, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), your local/state/federal government, and – of course – your campus leadership. In particular, the CDC (2020) recently released comprehensive recommendations for postsecondary institutions to help protect their community members and slow the spread of COVID-19. Ultimately, these guidelines should be combined with campus messaging about the importance of our collective efforts to care for one another

in ways that facilitate our mission and produce minimal disruption to our core services.

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Geoff Bailey, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of REACH (Resources for Academic Achievement) at the University of Louisville. He received his BS degree in Sports Medicine from Guilford College, his MS in Counselor Education from UNCG, and his PhD in Higher Education Administration from UNCG. Geoff's commitment to a servant leadership philosophy is evidenced in both his extensive institutional service and commitment to professional organizations. He has served as a NOSS accreditation reviewer since 2011, chairperson for ATP's Professional Development Committee for three years, and multiple committees for the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA).

In September 2016, Geoff earned the NCLCA Certified Learning Center Professional (Level 4) lifetime achievement. In October 2018, Geoff was installed as the Vice President of NCLCA and currently serves as the President. Additionally, Geoff serves as an adjunct faculty member for the College of Education at the University of Louisville where he teaches graduate level coursework for both the College Student Personnel and Higher Education Administration programs, as well as serving on doctoral comprehensive exam review and dissertation committees. His research interests include the impact of learning centers on students' success, persistence and retention efforts, assessment, and academic self-efficacy.

Developing an Exemplary Online Tutoring Program

By Johanna Dvorak, Ph.D.
Consultant

As the Director of the learning center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I became immersed in providing online support services on our campus in 2010. UWM has just decided to aggressively develop online undergraduate courses, and we were obligated to provide online tutoring for students who could not come to our center in person. I hope my experience can help you develop an excellent online tutoring program now that COVID-19 has mandated our new academic support virtual environment.

Since developing a successful online tutoring program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2010, I have been involved in presenting regularly at NCLCA and other CLADEA sister association conferences and in researching the state of online tutoring. In 2017, I received the NCLCA Brenda Pfaehler Professional Development Grant for online tutoring. The purpose of the research was to review current research in the field and to investigate how college learning centers were offering online tutoring. I presented those findings at the 2018 NCLCA conference at Niagara Falls.

These experiences led in 2018-2019 to my participation in an organized effort by a CLADEA sister association, the Association of Colleges for Tutoring and Learning Assistance

(ACTLA) to develop online tutoring standards for the field of college learning assistance. ACTLA conducted focus groups of experts, vendors, and members of sister associations in the Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) at their conferences. NCLCA was an active participant at the 2018 Niagara Falls conference focus group which I helped lead.

I participated in analyzing the findings with an ACTLA team. This resulted in us writing *Principles, Standards, and Effective Practices for Quality Online Tutoring*, known as the ACTLA Online NCLCATutoring Standards (www.actla.info). The Standards were completed and shared in April 2019 at ACTLA's annual conference and fall 2019 CLADEA association conferences including NCLCA.

How can you use the Standards to improve your online tutoring program? You can access the Standards at www.actla.info. The Standards include four categories: Infrastructure, Meaningful Engagement, Training, and Assessment & Evaluation. Each category delineates what to include as you develop your online tutoring program using best practices.

What is the next step? Why not apply for certification for your online tutoring program? CLADEA endorsed ACTLA's *Online Tutoring Program Certification* program in April 2020 based on the Standards. A white paper explaining the certification process is at www.actla.info. The Certification program and application will be launched in September 2020. Initial applications will be due by January 15, 2021.

Programs which would like to be certified must meet the following criteria:

- Be from a two or four-year public/private college or university
- Providing synchronous online tutoring
- Conduct online tutoring with the institution's students and/or professional tutors
- Have conducted online tutoring for at least one year
- Conduct training for online tutoring including general tutor training
- Use an interactive platform
- Evaluate the online tutors and assessment of the program

Whether you are starting an online tutoring program or already have developed your program, I hope these Standards and potential for Certification can enhance and provide recognition for your program.

About the Author



Johanna Dvorak, PhD., is Director Emerita, Educational Support Services, at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). She led development of a successful online tutoring program in 2010. She is a CLADEA Fellow and NCLCA Past President. Since retiring from UWM in 2016, she has consulted with college learning center professionals

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Fighting COVID-19: UC Learning Commons' Approach to Perseverance

**By Rebecca Elliott
Hannah Williamson
Samantha McMahon
Michela Buccini
University of Cincinnati**

Across the country this summer, learning centers are debriefing on an unprecedented spring semester and trying to plan for an equally unique fall. Many in the profession could never have imagined making changes to their programs in only a few weeks and even fewer would have imagined those changes would persist into the foreseeable future. The Learning Commons at the University of Cincinnati is no exception. Our office struggled with new challenges, but we were able to leverage our collective strengths to continue to serve students throughout the spring semester. Looking forward to the 2020-2021 academic year, we recognize some of these challenges will continue and new ones will arise but we also see the potential for opportunities to grow in ways we may not have if we had remained in a pre-COVID-19 world. The purpose of this article is twofold. The first is to tell our story of the Learning Commons and the work of dedicated professionals in a historical moment. The second is to share what we have learned with other learning center professionals

that may be valuable as they consider their programs for the 2020-2021 year.

Who We Are

To understand our story during COVID-19, it is important to understand who we are. The University of Cincinnati (UC) is a Research-I, urban campus with 35,000 undergraduate students. The Learning Commons serves as the centralized academic center on campus and offers a variety of academic and first-year supports. Nearly all of our services are conducted by peer educators. We have 11 professional staff members and throughout an academic year, we employ nearly 300 students. Approximately 7,000 students utilize our services each year.

<i>One-on-One Academic Supports</i>
<i>Academic Writing Center Academic Coaching Peer Tutoring</i>
<i>Group Workshops and Tutoring</i>
<i>First-Year Learning Communities Math and Science Support Center (Drop-in group tutoring) Success Skills Workshops (Academic habits and executive functioning skills)</i>
<i>Course Supports</i>
<i>Learning Assistants Supplemental Instruction Supplemental Review Sessions (Credit-bearing math review course)</i>

All of our support programs had to transition to a fully online format in only two weeks. Additionally, most professional staff had less than 24 hours to take what was needed from their office not realizing they would not return until mid-June and then only briefly to collect things from their office. These logistical challenges were overwhelming and could have been insurmountable but because of our strengths as an office and the strengths of our student staff, we

were able to continue offering all of our services online to students.

From pilot to permanent

Fortunately, when COVID-19 happened the Learning Commons had already been exploring online tutoring platforms. We had a goal to roll out an online tutoring pilot for a select course in fall 2019. In the summer of 2019, we met with several vendors and started to compare and contrast cost and features. Once we settled on GoBoard platform, we shared the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) with the office which reviews ADA compliance. We also sent all relevant documents to our Office of General Counsel to ensure we were meeting UC's standards for FERPA compliance and data protection. While the online tutoring pilot ultimately ended because of low student usage, all the work we had done getting the platform vetted by the relevant offices at UC meant we were confident when we went remote that we were meeting all of the institutional standards. We would encourage other centers to work with relevant campus offices to make sure any external platforms are compliant with laws and regulations.

Strength in Numbers

Coming into the COVID-19 remote period, the Learning Commons was already a strong office. We had well-defined program structures and policies which made it easier to conceptualize what moving online required. The office was already collaborative, having multiple-goal teams and projects where different professional staff could work closely with one another. Had we been siloed before COVID-19, things might not have transitioned as easily.

Three of our program coordinators in particular (Peer Tutoring, Math and Science Support Center, and

Supplemental Instruction) already worked in close coordination on their programs, regularly communicating and supporting one another. These prior relationships made it easier to brainstorm how services could operate and allowed us to run multiple “simulations” to see how the various platforms available to us could be used in the remote instruction period. Some of these platforms had been explored prior in the academic year (see *From pilot to permanent*). The program coordinator for Peer Tutoring had experience working in online environments before coming to UC and had run a few pilots of online tutoring with various university departments.

One major logistical decision was creating a virtual receptionist role. Because the online platforms could not interface with our scheduling software, TutorTrac, we wanted to make sure appointments were accurately recorded. In prior semesters, we had our student staff try to set up their TutorTrac kiosk to record their appointments. In many cases, they struggled to sign students in and out. Seeing that this could balloon to a bigger issue online, we included this role as part of the virtual receptionist.

We also believed the virtual receptionist could provide support to students and student staff in case of technological problems. Before working with students online, all student staff was required to complete a technology check which ensured they had the basic level of technology needed to run the service. However, this didn't mean that every appointment ran smoothly so the virtual receptionist was available to troubleshoot. During the remote period, the

virtual receptionist was usually a professional staff member. While tedious, this did allow us to experience how services ran remotely and helped us make important changes for the upcoming fall semester.

Our belief that a virtual receptionist was necessary to ensure proper appointment tracking may give the erroneous impression that we were not confident in the abilities of our student staff. Our student staff was one of our most important strengths coming into the remote period. All had at least eight weeks of work experience before the remote instruction period. Many of them were heavily involved in the beta-testing of platforms and gave us valuable feedback. It was this collective strength of professional, student, and graduate student staff that allowed us to make a quick and successful transition to a remote period. It is this collective strength that allows us to address any challenges, both now and in the future.

Challenges We Faced

COVID-19 brought a variety of changes that created challenges for the Learning Commons. One of the largest challenges was the vast number of unknowns we experienced. We waited for direction from our university as plans were adjusted and institutional direction was continually updated over spring and summer semesters. Together, we took the information from the university and made plans on how to best protect and serve students.

During this time, we also experienced a diffusion of leadership within the office. Our director moved on to another position just before COVID-19 and the University instituted a hiring freeze. During this time, all professional staff, including office leadership, had to take on additional roles to assist with direction and implementation.

Complications with communication

In our Supplemental Review Session (SRS) program, where SRS Leaders facilitate credit-bearing mathematics review courses, student staff struggled to set clear communication boundaries with their students when we went remote. Typically, communication between SRS Leaders and students is contained to the in-person sessions. Electronic communication about course announcements, attendance, or grading come from their supervisor. When we transitioned to virtual sessions, policies were revised to allow more communication between SRS Leaders and students. Each week, SRS Leaders sent course announcements and emails containing the class material and a link to join the virtual class. They were permitted to respond to student emails that had simple, straightforward questions about class information, policies, or content. They forwarded any questions that would be time consuming to respond to or were outside the scope of the SRS Leader's knowledge (ex. grading and enrollment) to their supervisor.

Several SRS Leaders found that the increased communication was beneficial in the new environment. However, the new policies gave students easier access to their SRS Leaders. Some SRS Leaders reported feeling a need to be available anytime they received communication from a student, especially when they had questions pertaining to math content. When students expressed stress or frustration, SRS Leaders wanted to help, even if it meant working unpaid which is discouraged by our office. It is likely that this urge to immediately respond was increased by the reality that SRS Leaders were on their computers constantly for their own courses. Our revised training for online services will include setting communication boundaries and recommending SRS Leaders encourage students to work and communicate with one another outside of class without the SRS Leader. We hope we can help the SRS Leaders create work/life balance by setting appropriate communication expectations while also attending to the needs of the students.

UC decided to extend Spring Break and we had approximately two weeks to make informed decisions about

how our programs would operate virtually. Before UC's shift to online instruction, the only online support offered by the Learning Commons was the option for virtual writing support through the Academic Writing Center. Our other programs had no online infrastructure and we had to determine online work and communication policies, protocols, and logistics for how services would operate, and which online platforms would be used (see *Complications with the communication*). Each program determined its plan, but we worked together to streamline as much as possible.

Some of our student staff chose not to work during this period for a variety of reasons (insufficient technology or internet, scheduling changes due to classes moving online, time zone changes when they returned home, stress, etc.) and we quickly made revisions to our programs' schedules to best utilize our continuing student staff.

As UC's faculty and staff worked to transition online, we struggled with the uncertainty around how faculty would conduct their classes. Would classes meet synchronously or asynchronously? What would be the format for exams and finals? What online platforms would be used for classes? We also faced challenges regarding technology; we were unsure which platforms would be recommended and supported by centralized IT and what level of assistance they could provide as students, faculty, and staff became increasingly reliant on technology. As we learned more, we made plans for how to continue to best support UC's students.

We encountered additional challenges as we resumed our services online. We found it difficult to predict student usage and needs and saw a decrease in attendance for many of our services. Technology became a barrier for some students trying to utilize our services, especially if the internet was not reliable where they were working. Our student staff also reported challenges with the loss of the face-to-face connection they typically experienced with their students, especially in programs where community building or student collaboration is essential. While we were able to address many of these challenges, at least in the short-term, we know they will persist in the coming year and there will be several new challenges, both known and unknown.

Building a virtual community

Community is something we strive for in the Academic Coaching program. Academic Coaches meet one-on-one with students to discuss effective ways to be a college student through practices such as study strategies. At times, appointments can be challenging and it is nice to talk to others who are experiencing the same situations. Academic Coaches are trained to follow FERPA guidelines and know that they can bring difficult situations to one another to talk about and find the best strategies to coach students. In the past, community building happened in the Academic Coach Prep Office. Academic Coaches who were in the office together would naturally form professional relationships with one another. There is a concern that not having that physical space will breakdown that community and make Academic Coaches feel as if they are on their own with no support. One idea, taken from the “virtual café” concept set up for writing groups, is to use an online platform, such as WebEx, for Academic Coaches to enter while prepping. They can use the space to ask questions of one another about resources and how to guide students through different worksheets.

Concerns for the Coming Year

To combat the unknowns associated with COVID-19 and its impact on UC for the coming academic year, we have

developed contingency plans for a variety of scenarios, such as professional staff learning how to run one another's programs in case of COVID-19 illness. This level of planning has been time-consuming and has shifted many of our ways of organizing and operating.

One of the biggest changes that we have had to make is shifting our fall 2020 in-person training to be entirely online. We will be using technology such as Canvas and Microsoft Teams to do both asynchronous and synchronous training. Typically, all employees train together for competency-based training, which covers information and skills that apply across all services and allows students to interact with staff from other positions. Students then move into position-specific training which allows for further community building with others in their position. With the shift to online training, we are concerned about the sense of community amongst the student staff that is naturally built during in-person training, and seeing one another in the office will be lost. To recreate these interactions and community, many programs are having student staff post videos on Canvas to introduce themselves and are planning other creative ways to incorporate the community building in virtual formats throughout the semester (see *Building a virtual community*). Additionally, we are not sure of the level of efficacy the training will provide because this fall will be the first time all student staff will be fully trained online. A survey will be sent to all student employees regarding training so adjustments can be made if we need to continue with online training in future semesters.

As we plan for fall training and services, our communication with our student staff has emphasized that their safety is our top priority.

Another negative consequence of COVID-19 is our lack of data on online usage to make decisions about the number of staff needed to serve students in the upcoming fall semester. It has been difficult to make service usage predictions since the move to remote learning in spring was abrupt and many students opted for pass/fail grading in their courses which minimized their need for our services. Due to the uncertainty about usage, we have decided

No student worker left behind

Our front desk receptionist staff are all work study students. As we transitioned to remote services, we grappled with how to keep these students employed given the nature of their role. These work study students are trained in the basic functions of each service we provide, their administrative duties, and guidance on how to be the "go to" for frequently asked questions for the office and greater university.

Starting last spring and now extending to the fall semester, we have taken creative steps to re-form the position to fit our needs and keep our staff. We have redefined the position to be more remote-friendly by making them the virtual "waiting room" attendant. Front desk receptionists greet students who enter the online platform, instruct them on the process of an online appointment with a student staff tutor, and troubleshoot technology and online platform issues. Additionally, they have been given administrative tasks to complete during their less busy wait room times including manual data entry, managing our office email account, and screening our voicemails. We have projected that we will actually increase the number of work study students rather than eliminate them. By thinking outside of the box, we have found a way to support our staff and provide a more streamline transition to online learning for students.

to hire fewer students to begin the fall semester. Once the semester is in progress, we will be better able to gauge usage and may hire additional students to work if needed. We determined this was the best way to avoid the potential of over hiring. This will also allow us to spend conservatively as the cost of training a new employee is a significant portion of our budget. We will instead hire as needed throughout the semester or academic year if we see an increase in usage.

We are concerned the low usage of spring will continue into fall as historically many students have learned about the Learning Commons through word of mouth. They had peer educators in their classrooms or interacted with other staff on campus, such as advisors, who recommended our center. With students choosing to stay home and courses being offered online this fall, we will need to find other creative outlets to market our services and be accessible to students.

Creativity and flexibility are skills that the Learning Commons has practiced during spring and summer semesters and they have become some of our greatest strengths.

While we acknowledge the challenges and the need for adaptability, we also believe COVID-19 has created opportunities for innovative thinking. We are looking at our programs with fresh eyes and believe we can support students, in some cases new populations of students, in creative ways.

The Opportunities of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our traditional way of providing our services and supporting our students. Like other learning centers, COVID-19 has changed us forever moving forward. We found though, that in this momentous transition, there have been growth opportunities.

The first opportunity was recognizing that any of our support services could be fully remote. Previously, we had been taking steps towards adding this option only for Peer Tutoring in addition to what was already offered by our Academic Writing Center. With the need for remote learning for every program, we took the action to transition all our services online in either a synchronous or asynchronous form. We were able to develop online training mid-semester for all our student staff (over 215 staff participated in this transitional training). We are now able to build infrastructure and wide-scale change in our office because of the transitions we made in spring. Looking forward to what services could be like after the pandemic, we will continue to offer a portion of services online for students.

Office leadership and staff have held firm in valuing our peer educators and their role in our office throughout this transition. Students who work on campus are more likely to persist through college and we have many students who financially depend on their job. With a staff of approximately 300 students throughout the academic year, we believed it was imperative to find a way to keep as many of them as possible during the transition to online services. We were able to successfully transition these peer educator roles and most

other student worker positions to keep a majority of our student staff in the spring semester. We have continued to value our student staff into the fall semester by creatively cutting down other areas of our budget and rethinking student roles (see *No student worker left behind*).

As noted, we were forced to review many of our processes and policies as we quickly transitioned to remote in the spring. This summer, we were able to look more in-depth at how all of our policies could be improved or adapted for online services. Many of them, upon assessment, was sound while others benefited from our reworking. For example, the financial strain created by COVID-19 prevented us from providing raises to students. While discouraging, we have begun to think more creatively about ways to provide regular and public recognition to students for the good work they are doing. We were also able to update and make our processes, particularly those around student employee performance, more flexible for online environments, and more effective as a result.

As noted above, one of our biggest challenges is the online training of student staff. However, this too held new opportunities. Upon discussion of this change, we found that we could provide equally substantial and effective training for our hires while keeping them healthy and safe at home. An additional benefit of this online training is that it will allow us to use the same training for any hiring we may need to do mid-semester, both during and after the pandemic. We anticipate a potential need for mid-semester hires given the

unpredictable demand for our services in the fall, our university's plan for most online courses, and our conservative hiring. It will also benefit us in the future as it allows for flexibility in training when we move back to in-person services. Typically, students who could not attend in-person training, for example, those on co-op or international students spending break in their home country, would not be hired due to the difficulty of make-up training. Now we will have fully virtual training for future semesters allowing us to hire students who would traditionally have been precluded from positions.

Looking to the future, we see other opportunities to connect and support more students. As we continue to hold services online, we are hopeful that we will be able to support new student populations that otherwise have not been strong users of our office services in the past (distance learners, regional campus students, etc.). We will need robust data collection to learn more about who is accessing services and their experiences while using services. We hope this information will be useful in semesters to come when making decisions about how to continue to offer online learning as we transition back to in-person services.

Conclusion

Change is never easy and COVID-19 required us to rethink our entire center from the top down. We encountered obstacles throughout the process but together we were able to overcome them. There will certainly be new obstacles this fall, those we have identified, and those for which we cannot plan.

Together, we were able to meet the challenges of the spring and summer and together we will meet the challenges of fall. We have learned some new things along the way, both about technology and student needs, but also about ourselves and how we interact as co-workers. This knowledge will continue to serve us as we move forward. This article has been a great journey in self-reflection for us and we hope that will serve the wider community as we all move into an unprecedented fall.

About the Authors



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Reflections on Transitioning to Remote Learning Assistance during COVID-19 and Possible Implications for the Future

By Darrin Sorrells

Christine Wittmer

University of Southern Indiana

When the pandemic forced us at the University of Southern Indiana to close the campus in mid-March, the original plan was to keep it closed and have only remote classes until early April; the situation would be closely monitored the remainder of the term. It was the goal at that time to be able to return to campus to finish the semester in mid-April. Students had been away from campus on spring break during the week of March 9; spring break was extended another week. However, classes that were already being delivered online for the entire semester resumed as scheduled on March 16. To allow faculty members sufficient time to transition their in-person and hybrid courses to remote delivery, all other classes resumed one week later on March 23.

As professional staff members in the campus learning assistance center, Academic Skills, we, like so many of our colleagues in higher education, were venturing into uncharted waters so to speak. Historically, we have operated primarily as a drop-in learning assistance center, not requiring appointments for subject-based tutoring although appointments were options for students seeking assistance

with writing or with academic coaching. We did have a system in place for students requesting individual, online tutoring sessions for selected subject areas, such as statistics and chemistry. Even so, very few students ever requested online appointments. We have had a unique email address for a few years where students desiring online sessions could send their requests. The platform that we had used the past three academic years for such online learning assistance sessions was goboard.com. Our school had participated in a pilot project with goboard.com a few years ago along with other institutions, and we had decided to continue to use it as the learning platform for requested online sessions.

When we first learned that the campus would be closed for at least a few weeks in March and April, the professional staff members in our learning assistance center pivoted quickly. We met and decided upon a plan of action. We divided various tasks among ourselves. Based on historic usage data and identified high-demand subject areas, along with the availabilities of our student-employees (tutors, academic coaches, and supplemental instruction leaders) and their technology capabilities, we designed our approach to be able to provide all remote learning assistance. We were able to provide guidance to tutors, supplemental instruction leaders, and academic coaches and equip them with at least a basic working knowledge of technology and online delivery. In addition to goboard.com, we also decided to utilize Zoom. All students, faculty, and staff at the University of Southern Indiana already had free Zoom accounts, so we decided to utilize that option as well. Before leaving campus, we decided

who would oversee and monitor various functions and services, such as scheduling the online tutoring appointments, data collection, etc. The campus officially closed for employees and students on March 17. We had completed all our discussions and work in literally just a couple of days! While anxious about COVID-19 and moving entirely to remote learning assistance, we left campus not knowing how effective services would be or how long this would last. We were, though, as optimistic as possible because we had moved quickly and had established a process for remote delivery; moreover, we had updated our website and social media accounts to inform students about the new process for remote learning assistance.

Fast forward into April, and we then realized that we would not return physically to campus for the remainder of the academic year, which ultimately became early July. Honestly, despite initial anxiety about the uncertainty about online learning assistance, the transition for our department was not too challenging logistically. We continued to remain in contact with one another through weekly Zoom staff meetings, text messages, and emails. Additionally, we were very fortunate to have two amazing graduate assistants working in our department who helped us with the scheduling of online tutoring appointments, maintaining contact with tutors, and providing routine updates on social media. However, just because we had the online structure and logistics in place, it did not necessarily mean that students would utilize the services.

We did experience a level of success when we transitioned to all remote learning assistance in the spring term. Our tutors and SI leaders who conducted the online sessions quickly adapted to the virtual environment. They did a nice job of becoming acquainted with technology and online platforms. Moreover, the students who requested online tutoring sessions and attended online supplemental instruction (SI) sessions provided overall positive feedback about their experiences; many of those students participated in multiple online learning assistance sessions in the spring semester. For the SI program specifically, there were even larger attendance numbers for some online sessions in biology and chemistry than the in-person sessions that had been conducted earlier in the spring term. We believe that increase may have been attributed to the flexibility that online SI afforded students. For example, SI leaders recorded their sessions utilizing such technology as Voice Threads and Zoom. Students could then review recorded SI sessions at times that were best for them. This provided more flexibility than traditional, in-person SI sessions that occur only two-three set times weekly. Moreover, students typed comments and questions when using Voice Threads and Zoom; the SI leaders would then clarify information. It provided an opportunity for some students to ask questions when they might not otherwise have felt comfortable doing so in an in-person session. Therefore, we did have some success when we moved to all online learning assistance, especially with SI, and hope to build on that success as we will continue to offer some online learning assistance this upcoming fall.

Despite our success with the design and delivery of online learning assistance as well as the positive outcomes with SI, however, we also encountered some challenges, specifically related to tutoring and academic coaching. As we have heard for years in higher education, we have needed to offer more distance education and online courses as well as online learning assistance sessions to meet the needs of today's college students. With that thinking in mind, some may have believed that this would be the time when we would see an overall increased demand and usage of our online services. After all, is not that what we have been migrating toward for the past two decades in higher education? Yet, what we found, was quite the opposite. While we did have success with our transition to online delivery in the spring as mentioned earlier, and while many students did utilize the online services, the overall number of students seeking online tutoring and academic coaching decreased dramatically as the spring term progressed. We have continued to see the decline in our usage numbers this summer as well. While some of the decline is probably attributed to a lack of technology or low intrinsic motivation for some of our students, we believe that there may be another reason which does make us reflect about the future for learning assistance centers on college campuses.

Maybe, just maybe, the race toward online learning assistance the past several years may not be the best way to deliver services, especially for some colleges and universities. Our learning center has always been a drop-in center; no appointments were needed. While we provided options for

online, the overwhelming number of our tutoring and academic coaching sessions had always been in-person, therefore, there really may be something about the one-to-one personal connections and interactions among students and tutors/academic coaches. Perhaps many of today's college students enjoy their social media accounts and electronic communication mediums, but maybe when it comes to learning assistance services, most might prefer in-person rather than online. Of course, this just has been our recent experience. It is certainly different on each campus, and there is no question that online courses and online learning assistance can be effective and can benefit many students. We are advocates for alternative delivery methods and approaches, and we are not suggesting eliminating online services. However, for us, it means that we must take a step back and think about the future of learning assistance on our campus. Yes, life after COVID-19 will be here at some point, hopefully very soon. At that time, while we will continue to provide some online options, we are perhaps going to allocate most of the budget, time, and resources to what students seem to want: onsite, in-person learning assistance. This summer we even surveyed our tutors, academic coaches, and SI leaders about their online experiences from the spring and ideas for planning for the fall; the clear consensus was that, while effective, online delivery was not the preferred method. Like the students they assisted, our student-employees missed in-person services and missed such experiences while working remotely.

That thinking has also shaped what we are implementing this fall. We will continue to provide several online SI Sessions; we will also offer some online tutoring sessions. However, we will also offer a greater number of onsite, individual tutoring, and academic coaching sessions by appointments due to social distancing guidelines. We have also been able to relocate some of our tutoring areas into available classrooms in our building this fall; those areas will serve as drop-in help rooms with limited numbers of students, again due to social distancing. There is no question that this upcoming academic year will be challenging and a vast departure from the norm. Our office already has plexiglass at the front desk. Everyone will be required to wear face coverings when working in open office spaces and classrooms. Our student-employees will be trained on cleaning protocols (that was not part of the initial application nor asked during their interviews). Nonetheless, we will persevere and provide quality learning assistance. After all, in the end, that is what we must do. We are all in this together!

About the Authors



Dr. Darrin Sorrells is a learning specialist at the University of Southern Indiana where he is responsible for the recruiting, hiring, training, and supervising of approximately 75 student-employees annually who serve as peer tutors and academic coaches. He also is an adjunct instructor for the psychology and sport management departments.



Ms. Christine Wittmer is a learning specialist at the University of Southern Indiana. She oversees the supplemental instruction program and the academic reading strategies classes. She also teaches First-Year Experience and a variety of reading courses.

The COVID-19 Rollercoaster

By Chelsea O'Brien

SUNY Genesee Community College

This spring was like a rollercoaster. As a student of political science, international relations, and higher education administration, I could slowly see the build-up of what was to come. Here is a timeline of events, changes, and challenges (as well as a few solutions we came up with) presented to me during the spring semester.

Friday, January 31st

I travel to Seattle, Washington, where the airport has begun to screen for passengers COVID-19. I transferred through Detroit, where I saw a few people wearing masks, but nothing out of the ordinary. Although I did bring extra hand sanitizer and wipes, I don't think I used either. The conference I attend never mentions the outbreak happening across the ocean, the extra screening at the local airport, or preparations for additional health security measures.

Tuesday, February 4th

I travel from Seattle back home, to Rochester, NY, and transfer through Minneapolis. Again, nothing too unusual while traveling.

Wednesday, February 5th

I return to work and several colleagues and staff ask about my travels, asking different questions than usual. Are people wearing masks? Was it scary? Were there any noticeable differences in the airports?

February 21st

I ask for two of my staff members to be added to the generic email (tutoring@genesee.edu). Partially this is an expansion of work already in play, but it's also a measure to ensure work continuity should anything happen to me.

February 28th

The first email from the college's President is sent, stating that we will follow posted guidelines and sharing CDC guidelines to stay healthy.

Tuesday, March 3rd

I send an email to my writing tutors notifying them that we're going to meet on March 18th to discuss the certification process that will begin during the second half of the semester.

Thursday, March 5th

My staff and I are keeping a close eye on the situation, and "current events" are alluded to in a draft of a campus-wide email we're planning on sending out.

Friday, March 6th

I shared The University of Washington's closure announcement with my supervisor. I alert all of my tutors that they now have Zoom accounts and share Zoom training resources.

Monday, March 9th

Spring Break week begins. Most of my staff are not scheduled to work this week. I send a draft of a paper called *Keep on Tutoring* to my assistant to look over. *Keep on Tutoring* outlines the basics of how we would continue to do our work even if we were off-campus due to an emergency.

Tuesday, March 10th

I have lunch with two colleagues off-campus. I don't think we knew it would be the last time we'd do that.

March 11th

The President's office sends out two emails. The first saying that college leaders are closely monitoring the situation. Then, Governor Cuomo announces major changes in New York state, with guidelines on education institutions and their closures. He announces that all SUNY campuses will move to distance learning beginning March 19th. The second email from the president is sent, sharing the guidelines from the state, including extending our spring break until the 19th, at which point all classes will be held remotely. I want to crawl under my desk and cry, my anxiety is so bad I shake. My need to fulfill my anxiety's needs were so overwhelming. All I want

to do was go to the grocery store and buy boxes of fruit, like clementines. Why, clementines? No idea. I also want to buy dish soap. Anxiety is weird. I can barely sleep at night.

March 13th

I start to move documentation to Microsoft 365 files or into my drive and off of the shared network drives. I invite my assistant to play with these new files to become familiar with them. I also send emails to all of my student workers about attending one of the two required meetings for them. I plan to give them updates about changes in the Tutoring Center. I receive guidance from the faculty member who coordinates our developmental math courses about how they will be holding classes. I work with our Marketing and Communications staff about what to share with those asking about tutoring: *“The Tutoring and Academic Support Center will continue to operate as we normally do, with the addition of offering services through Zoom. A larger announcement regarding Zoom meetings and services other than one-on-one tutoring will be coming out soon.”*

Monday, March 16th

I have a required Zoom meeting with my student workers, I tell them we have a plan on how to keep them, and others, safe in the Tutoring Center. I introduce new cleaning procedures, and in- and out-checklists for the student workers to complete. I have the first of three required tutor meetings and leisurely hand out materials and ask them to complete a survey about the technology they have access to in case they

don't come back to campus. I also announce that all writing tutors will be added to the tutoring@genesee.edu distribution email and that they will be responsible for working asynchronously with students who send in their papers.

I inquire with our campus centers what their plans are for their tutors moving forward. I send multiple emails to our IT folks about getting TutorTrac updates and integrated with Zoom.

This is also the start of spring break for the institution where I'm enrolled in a Ph.D. program. I had big plans for this week, I was going to jump-start my final project! Today is the last day I'll physically see my assistant.

March 17th

This is my last full day on campus for the spring semester.

I ask for the creation of a new Blackboard organization to house our workshop materials. I host the second of three required tutor meetings - I hand out thumb drives, laminated whiteboards, whiteboard markers, and notepads as materials to be taken home. By the afternoon letters were being distributed to staff about their new, temporary status. I inform staff to take whatever they think they'll need for the rest of the term home, including technology. I don't have the time or resources to log everything taken, so I instruct my staff to email me with what they have when they get home.

I stay late into the evening calling the staff members I haven't spoken to in person about the changes. As the day

progresses I build different stacks of materials on my desk, thinking of things I might need through the next several weeks. I set up multiple TutorTrac refresher Zoom meetings and communicate that to my tutoring staff and the campus center folks.

Wednesday, March 18th

I begin to log daily life in my planner, which was originally purchased to track my school work. I inquire with Payroll and HR offices about submitting time cards for my staff electronically - we can collect that in TutorTrac! I notify my student workers that their employment in the Tutoring Center is suspended.

I send a draft email to all of my staff as well as campus center leadership with the information I want to send to the rest of the community. This includes a PDF of instructions for students on how to use TutorTrac to create appointments, which we were not fully utilizing, how one-on-one tutoring will be operating moving forward, the status of our planned workshops (suspended), and the creation of online learning communities.

Thursday, March 19th

I communicate with the Library staff, among others, that there will no longer be in-person tutoring available.

Monday, March 23rd

I inquire with HR if my only peer tutor can continue working since work-study funding has been suspended. Since peer and professional tutors are paid out of my operating

budget, my request is approved. My peer tutor works a similar schedule to one of the professional tutors, so all Zoom links to the peer tutor connect to the professional tutor, who then creates breakout rooms for the peer tutor. I spend a good amount of time troubleshooting Zoom and TutorTrac for both tutors and students. I'm brought in on a grant proposal.

Tuesday, March 24th

I have an email exchange with a staff member who has taken on the responsibility of setting up a Discord server for staff communication.

Thursday, March 26th

The staff member assisting with setting up a new Blackboard organization emails me to tell me it's up and running. Now we have a place to build workshops, create modules, and share resources.

Friday, March 27th

I send my first daily update in my now-adopted format. Subject: Tutoring Update [Date], and then just a list of all of the updates and news that pertain to my staff or students who use tutoring services. I work with my supervisor's assistant, since Tutoring's assistant is out on medical leave, to fix the Tutoring Center's voicemail password and arrange for her to help with listening to any messages left.

Monday, March 30th

Furlough notices are sent out to various staff members, including tutors and my assistant. All tutors at our campus centers are affected. Furloughs begin April 1st. I send out a campus-wide email, one of the many I'll send in the next several weeks. I outline how many appointments students have scheduled, the days and times for our collaborative Learning Communities, reminders about how students can work with tutoring staff, website updates, and how students can access us via Blackboard.

Tuesday, March 31st

With the announcement of furloughs and budget changes, I email some of my tutoring staff alerting them to changes in their schedules - mainly cuts to their hours. I looked carefully at how many appointments students were making and how often they were working. Unfortunately, to conserve funds in Tutoring's budget, I need to make changes.

Thursday, April 9th

I'm involved in a conversation about fall course planning, specifically how we can serve our international student population if we continue to be online. I notice a weird trend in our tutoring data: students schedule appointments for 30 minutes, but most sessions go about an hour. I ask the tutors if they would prefer to change their appointment blocks to an hour, but most prefer to stick to 30-minute blocks for flexibility.

Monday, April 13th

I announce an update in TutorTrac: students can now see tutor email addresses so students can be in direct contact. I also share with staff that I'll be returning to campus on the 16th, and if they need something from campus now is the time to ask.

Wednesday, April 15th

Campus discussions about summer are happening, and courses are being canceled. I announce to my staff that this will likely directly affect us, our scheduling, and how many hours scheduled tutors may be asked to work. I start reaching out to faculty about how tutors might be useful for certain courses or if we can virtually visit courses to introduce our services. I also send an email to our accounting faculty to see if they would like to continue our embedded tutor system for the fall.

Thursday, April 16th

I return to campus for about an hour. I retrieve files, books, and other materials I'll need to make it through the first part of the summer. I also clean out the mini-fridge.

Friday, April 17th

We begin announcing our planned Math and Science bashes, held in the evening during the last week of classes. I also announce to the tutoring staff that we will be foregoing any end-of-semester requirements, such as evaluations, peer

observations, and reporting of training they attended. But! I also say that these are important tools for professional development, and if any tutor wants to meet about these things, I will make time to do so. I make my first statement about fall: “So, what about fall? I don't know yet.”

Monday, April 27th

Before March 18th, all Tutoring Center staff, but not the Writing Center staff, were asked to hand out half-sheets of paper with a short survey about their tutoring session. Today I announced that all tutors should be sending out an online survey, via Google Form, to ask students for feedback regarding their tutoring sessions.

Tuesday, April 28th

I receive my first inquiry about summer tutoring, I respond that a schedule will be shared campus-wide “in the next week or so”. I send out a “very (very, very) rough draft of the fall schedule” to the tutoring staff.

Friday, May 1st

I send out the summer tutoring schedule to the tutoring staff as well as the summer hiring paperwork. I send a request to my supervisor for 21 days off over the summer to use my vacation for the fiscal year. It's a busy email day! I send an email campus-wide with all of our end-of-spring plans, including information about Math and Science Bash, the summer tutoring schedule, and a brief overview of the summer workshop schedule.

Wednesday, May 13th

Today is the last day of spring finals week.

About the Author



Chelsea O'Brien is the Coordinator for Tutoring and Academic Support at SUNY Genesee Community College. She has been at GCC since April 2018 and is a PhD student at University at Albany SUNY in Curriculum and Instruction. Chelsea enjoys being in the garden and kitchen and walking her dog Washington.

Mentoring in the Time of COVID: Reflections from One Online University

By Ashley Babcock, Ed.D.

Linda Cummins, Ph.D.

Richard Dinneen, Ed.D.

Northcentral University

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on faculty, students, and institutions is profound. At Northcentral University, a completely online, private, not-for-profit university, the School of Education’s faculty and leadership team found ways to come together as a community that spans across the United States and over nineteen countries to support students, their children, and one another. This reflection focuses on three perspectives—associate dean, dissertation chair and faculty mentor, and dissertation chair and faculty senator—to portray a multifaceted view of how support and a sense of community evolved during the pandemic.

Dissertation Chair and Faculty Mentor

By late April, faculty were noticing the added stress that students were experiencing as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Changes in their home and work lives, and everyone at home due to lockdown resulted in many challenges: a loss of studying and writing space at home; added responsibility of homeschooling children while learning to work remotely; loss of family and friends to the

virus; loss of support systems; and students contracting the virus themselves. Learning and teaching under such difficult conditions can be stifling, and students were experiencing sadness, anxiety, anger, inability to focus, and forgetfulness. The act of one faculty member to offer online *Story Time* during the Mother's Day week inspired faculty members to consider other ways we could support students, parents, and children during the lockdown. Many children attended *Story Time* while mothers and fathers had the opportunity to take a much-needed break.

Dissertation Chair and Faculty Senator

Although NCU student support is and has always been a key component of the one to one model, evolving to the COVID-19 issue caused a slight shift for myself on how I supported my students. Some students were not affected, but many had taken on new issues and had higher stress levels. Having kids at home and working in the same environment caused new challenges for students. Understanding how to show empathy and sympathy to support them was vital for their success.

Considering how difficult working at home and home-schooling students must be for parents, I was motivated to find a way to support our working moms. Before Mother's Day, I wanted to give back to our moms and allow them to have thirty minutes of downtime while I read stories via Zoom to their children. With the support of my leadership team, we set up two days and two times during the week before Mother's Day. I read four different books and had

interactions not only with the children but with parents as well. Although it was only thirty minutes, all attendees seemed to enjoy the time spent on the zoom call, and hopefully, some moms enjoyed the time alone.

Associate Dean

As an online institution, many people may think business continued as usual, but from March onward, life was anything but “normal.” As part of the leadership team, I saw firsthand the far-reaching impact the pandemic had on Northcentral’s students, especially in the School of Education. Educators were thrust into a new world of online learning with very little training, and day after day, I reviewed cases of struggling students to see how we could best help them. As we (faculty and leadership) all scrambled to find the best way to offer empathy and support on a large scale, a Mother’s Day reading for children seemed to be the bright spot in everyone’s week. Using the *Story Time* event as the creative catalyst, faculty began to meet to discuss what else we could offer students and their families in terms of support during the time of the pandemic.

Dissertation Chair and Faculty Mentor

While not knowing what would come out of it, a zoom meeting was organized for faculty to talk about student challenges and how faculty were managing the learning process during the pandemic. It started by just telling student stories. One student who had been absent from the course room for weeks finally responded to an email outreach and

explained that she lived in New York, was a nurse, and had not left the hospital for 3 weeks as she worked 20-hour shifts and then slept at the hospital for brief periods—this went on for weeks. Other students had contracted the virus and were hospitalized, but were still trying to work on their assignments in the hospitals until nurses confiscated their phones and laptops. Another student had lost a family member to the virus and was struggling with how to make final arrangements during the pandemic. Stories poured out from faculty members over that first meeting, and it became clear that we had a common purpose to focus on and to organize around—how to support students and each other through the COVID-19 crisis. The group decided to arrange ongoing meetings to develop a support network for students and faculty. Thus, began the regular *Faculty Coffee Chat*.

Associate Dean

The first *Faculty Coffee Chat* had over forty people attend and stories of students and the support they needed quickly filled the half-hour. Another *Faculty Coffee Chat* was quickly schedule for an hour the next week. Even in that half-hour, a pattern emerged—a need for connection, support, community, and resources (tons of resources) to support our students, their children, and other educators as they navigated the new terrain of virtual education.

Dissertation Chair and Faculty Senator

With schools being paused on opening, support will need to continue to assist our students. Since many of our students will continue to have children at home, locating resources to help them be successful will be important. Finding educational materials and ideas to help meet the needs of students and parents will be a great way to alleviate some stress in their lives and allow them to focus more on their studies. Since our university is on-line, we can use our skill sets to help our students be successful in any environment they utilize.

Dissertation Chair and Faculty Mentor

Faculty began to identify resources that could be used to help students through their coursework and the stress in their lives. Some strategies that began to emerge from the collaborative discussion of faculty included:

- Faculty agreed that just acknowledging where students were at the time of contact, and letting them know that faculty, the dean's office, and the university were supporting them through these difficult times went a long way to relieve students' anxiety. They needed to know we were in their corner.
- Using the incomplete grade option also helped to relieve stress when students needed more time to complete assignments. Sending an email letting them know they have an extra 3 weeks to complete

their course work was a major source of relief and comfort.

- Overstressed students often found it difficult to focus and recall instructions from conference calls, or lost their notes. Going to zoom meetings with students allowed faculty to record the meetings and then send the recordings to students who could then revisit them as needed.
- Emailing students just to keep in touch was another lifeline that helped students feel connected, supported, and grounded in their NCU community.

There was a united effort among faculty to come together and to find ways to make completing a course or staying in an academic program possible for students. We were serious about not losing students to the stress of COVID-19.

Associate Dean

As the lockdown caused by the pandemic continued, it became clear that the faculty at Northcentral University had a gift—teaching through engagement in an online setting—and this gift could be given to others through a center that provided resources and support, not only to Northcentral University’s student-educators but to all educators who needed resources to support transitioning to online or hybrid learning.

Dissertation Chair and Faculty Mentor

By our third *Faculty Coffee Chat*, we were thinking outside the box, and an unbelievable array of options was identified to

create and make public for students, faculty, and the teaching public at large. With the advent of COVID-19 and the overnight transition from the traditional classroom to remote teaching/learning, many schools and communities have been left with few resources to build effective online learning environments. It became obvious that since NCU does virtual education so well, that this was the place to create an interactive space where faculty can be out front sharing their expertise in online teaching; and supporting the development of new online teachers. We are growing an organic teaching resource that has implications for online learning for educators everywhere during the pandemic. Named the *Virtual Education Support Center (VESC)* scheduled to launch in fall 2020, *VESC* will focus on supporting online education for teachers, administrators, and parents in the K-12, and educators in higher education. The center will provide support, collaboration, and professional development through blogs, podcasts, resources, and micro-credentialing.

Associate Dean

This pandemic has been a time of stress and sadness, but also a time of community and innovation in the spirit of helping others. From *Story Time* to support moms to *Faculty Coffee Chat* to the beginning of *VESC*, the faculty at Northcentral University have shown that they can come together during dire times to not only support students but to create something of substance that can help many people facing a seismic shift in education.

Dissertation Chair and Faculty Senator

Only at NCU can an idea like *Story Time* become the catalyst for addressing students' needs. Wishing to help out Moms during these trying times with a simple book reading has resulted in the inspiration for the *Faculty Coffee Chats* and *VESC*. Positive input that involves many colleagues makes the heart feel good. The NCU leadership team, faculty, and staff members are always willing to help out in trying times. Working here is more than a job; it is an inspiration to give back to the most important part of the community — our amazing students. Moving forward, there will surely be more issues to address. However, a mantra at NCU is, "What can we do to help?" This mantra and the mindset of so many is what makes NCU a special place.

About the Authors



Dr. Ashley Babcock has been with NCU since 2017, and is currently the Associate Dean

of the School of Education and a Professor of Education. Previously, she served as the Associate Director of the Academic Success Center. Dr. Babcock is on the editorial board of the Learning Assistance Review (TLAR), and she is the founder and past-president of the Maryland College Learning Center Association (MDCLCA), which is an affiliate of the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA). Her most recent publications are on learning center support, diversity and inclusion in higher education, and alignment in curricular and co-curricular assessment. She lives in Virginia with her husband, two kids, and dog.



Dr. Linda Cummins is a professor, dissertation chair, and faculty mentor in the School of Education at Northcentral University. Her background is in nursing and social work, with a focus on clinical work, research, and social policy. She is co-authored two books, *Social work skills for beginning direct practice: Text, workbook, and web-based interactive case studies* (4th ed.); and, *Policy practice for social workers: An Ethic of Care approach* (in press). Dr. Cummins' current research is in care ethics. She lives on her organic farm on the South Coast of Oregon.



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Certificates:

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Dissertation: A Study of the Factors Supporting Compliance With Title IX and the Barriers Acting as Obstacles to Compliance With Title IX

Responding to COVID19: Changing Modalities in an Uncertain Time: The Rapid Shift of ACE of on-ground Tutoring and Modified Supplemental Instruction (mSI) to Full Remote Tutoring and Support

By Aimee Tiu Wu, Ed.D

Rob Sheftel

Naugatuck Valley Community College

During March 2020, Naugatuck Valley Community College closed all on ground classes and activities due to COVID-19. This impact was felt throughout the campus, specifically our tutoring center, the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE). This dramatic and abrupt change forced us to rethink how we delivered tutoring and academic support to students. Traditionally, the ACE has held all tutoring, academic coaching, and Modified Supplemental Instruction (mSI) on both of our campuses. (Our mSI provides additional support to our developmental English and math courses.) With over 60 staff tutors, academic coaches, and Modified Supplemental Instruction (mSI) leaders on two campuses, the change from an on-ground modality to purely online was a monumental change.

The ACE is dedicated to helping Naugatuck Valley Community College students achieve their goal of academic success through in-person tutoring and other academic support services. In response to the current developments

of COVID-19, our goal at the ACE is to continue to provide the greatest possible flexibility to our students and staff and make decisions that support students in completing their assignments and allowing them to advance in their academic program. To protect our staff and students, we shifted the ACE in-person tutoring and academic support services to online tutoring and support using Microsoft Teams.

ACE in Cyberspace: How did we get started?

In mid-February, we were thrilled to welcome our new Associate Director of the ACE. At this time, the coronavirus was making headlines in distant parts of the world, so during the onboarding process, we talked about the virus potentially hitting the US and its impact on college campuses.

Prior to the directive by the President on March 12th that campuses will be implementing telework plans beginning March 13th, the ACE had been using Microsoft Teams for the ACE core staff, as well as for two special cohort programs: Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS), a grant funded program, and the Men's group. During the weeks leading up to this announcement, when reports of COVID19 became increasingly frequent and alarming, we began to explore possible options on virtual tutoring platforms. These exploratory conversations led to the first draft of a remote tutoring proposal. In our team meetings we also discussed potential scenarios and our staff were asked to download TEAMS on their mobile devices and explore how this could be used with tutoring and mSI.

Within one day in mid-March, the NVCC campus was fully remote, and during the following week that was fortunately spring break, we began the heavy work of creating an NVCC ACE TUTORING CHANNEL on Microsoft TEAMS which allowed early adopters to start navigating the Teams platform. It was also decided that mSi classes would be migrated to the TEAMS classroom as well. The mSi Leaders and all ACE tutors were notified of this shift, as well as faculty and department chairs. Live trainings were offered through TEAMS and training videos were created for tutors and mSI leaders and faculty to access asynchronously.

Since the sudden pivot online, we have remained steadfast in our mission that distance should not distract and/or hinder us from providing quality academic support to our students. Spring break bought us time and allowed us to fine-tune our work flow and expectations online. Based on the review of work flow as well as feedback from the core team, we determined that an ACE greeter was needed to triage requests online, which come in via the request form found on the NVCC Resource Page. The focus during this time was marketing our services to our students (see video), training students and staff on how to access the TEAMS platform (see video), training faculty who would like to teach using TEAMS, and collecting feedback about the entire process through a post-tutoring satisfaction survey.

We also began reviewing our efficiency by drawing a process map (see figure 1 below) of how students can reach us via Microsoft TEAMS. To fully understand the process, we

took turns serving as greeters during this period to work out any bugs in the system. This hands-on experiential learning approach helped us to fine-tune the system as well as create a post-tutoring feedback form that allows us to gather information on our services and performance online.

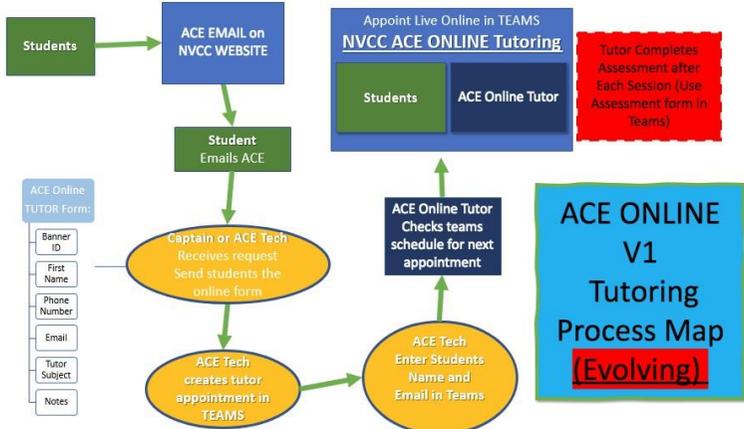


FIGURE 1: INITIAL PROCESS FLOW FOR ACE IN CYBERSPACE

ACE in Cyberspace: Providing both Synchronous and Asynchronous Models

The on-ground tutoring model at the ACE is synchronous, where students and tutors come together and interact simultaneously. Aside from continuing the synchronous tutoring model online, our migration to remote tutoring explored the use of an asynchronous format as well, since this pandemic has forced many students into unexpected caregiving roles and/or extended their work hours. We leveraged the accessibility of YouTube to deliver asynchronous tutorial videos, which allowed us to continue engaging students using short, focused videos related to academic study skills and how-to-use TEAMS.

Our online tutoring provided a number of options: one-on-one tutoring, group sessions led by a tutor, as well as sessions that include groups of students, their instructor, and a tutor for support (mSI model). Live tutoring via TEAMS video conferencing allowed students to meet with a tutor in one-on-one tutoring sessions via a fully interactive, virtual environment. Live sessions were offered for all subjects, and students could check the weekly tutoring schedule to see when a tutor for their subject would be online. We suggested that students use a headset with a microphone for live tutoring sessions, though it was not required.

mSI Online

Since the early adopters of Teams are mostly mSI Leaders, the transition to virtual setting has been relatively smooth. Prior to the campus closing, the Associate Director had been discussing with the mSI leaders and department chairs about this potential shift. Once the TEAMS classrooms set up on both campuses (17 at one; 7 at the other), students were manually populated in each classroom, and faculty/mSI leaders were assigned to their corresponding classrooms. This process was tedious and very time consuming but necessary to maintain continuity of mSI sessions during the campus closing.

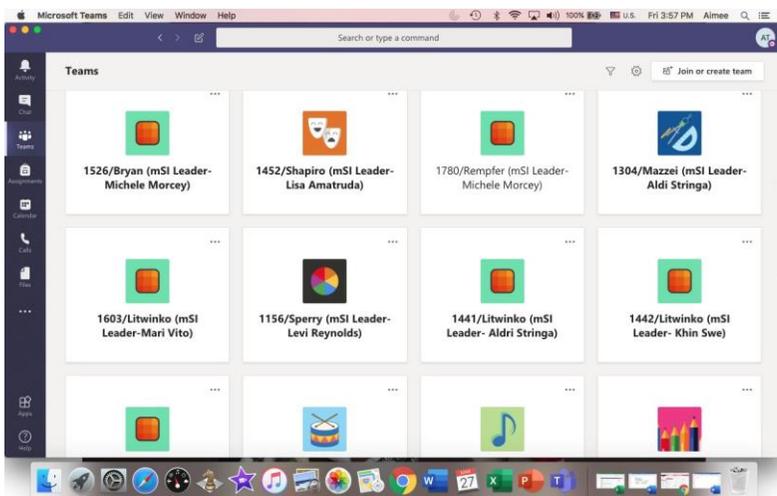


FIGURE 2: SCREENSHOT VIEW OF MSI CLASSES ON MICROSOFT TEAMS

PASS Program

The Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS) program is an academic intervention program designed to support students of color who are on academic probation and need to redress their academic standing. In response to the COVID-19 quarantine mandate, we quickly implemented an online outreach/engagement approach. Through the use of the Microsoft TEAMS online platform, PASS coaches continued to meet with students during their scheduled workshop sessions and for their individual coaching sessions to discuss various academic skills development and life skills techniques. Tutoring sessions were also held in the same manner and increased in frequency as students reached out for help over the course of the semester. Special accommodations were made for students who could not attend their scheduled workshops and/or coaching sessions. This active outreach resulted in 85% of our students engaging with us weekly. The

results of this program are promising with many students having increased their GPA and being removed from academic probation.

Training and Calibrating our Staffs on TEAMS

We have been offering training on the use of Microsoft TEAMS to all tutors, mSI leaders, and support staff since March 16, 2020. Three trainings were offered daily at 9 a.m., 12nn and 4 p.m. for how many weeks? Or is this ongoing now as well?. To date, 100% of tutors (n= 60) and 100% of mSi Leaders (n= 14) from both Waterbury and Danbury campuses have been trained in Microsoft Teams.

These ongoing trainings have become a forum to discuss:

- the different components of the TEAMS platform- from getting started to how to run meetings on teams
- how to serve students better in the virtual setting, as well as pull together a repository of learning resources to aid students in their learning
- how we ourselves are coping amidst this pandemic

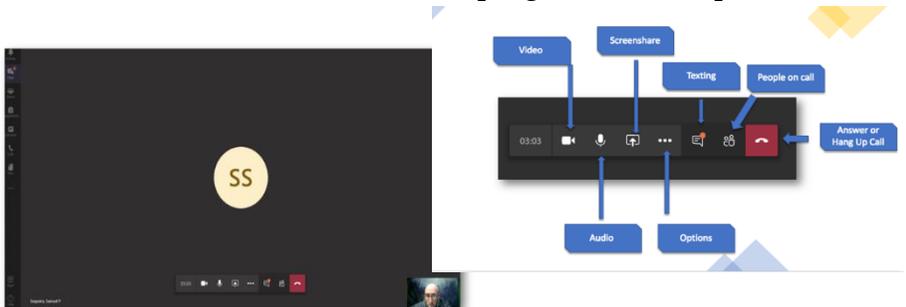


FIGURE 3: A SNIPPET OF THE CONTENT OF THE TUTOR AND MSI LEADER TRAINING

Lessons, Reflections and Looking Ahead: Continuous Engagement and Innovation

1. As online tutoring continues to grow, we have recognized the need to further develop the culture of online tutoring within NVCC and our students. A key part of establishing our online tutoring is establishing the expectations and the parameters for students. For example, students who contacted us will do so via Microsoft Forms. They will need to have Microsoft TEAMS app on their devices in order to communicate with us.
2. We have seen some patterns between synchronous and asynchronous requests. For example, in writing, students prefer asynchronous help as they tend to submit a draft of their paper to an ACE tutor, ask for specific feedback, and receive their work back with a tutor's response within 24 hours. For Math and science-oriented subjects, students typically prefer synchronous video/audio calls.
3. In early April, we created a video to remind our students and community that we are available to support them in a variety of ways. Our staff from both campuses almost immediately reported greater synergy online. We had a virtual coffee hour, as well as a virtual retirement party for our beloved Administrative Assistant. After being cooped up at home for several weeks, it was refreshing to see everyone and enjoy the beautiful tribute video for all our staffs. Given the circumstances, we were happy to toast from behind a computer screen, knowing that we in so doing we were

keeping our families and community safe while reconnecting with each other.

4. Even though we have kept our services virtual, we recognize that it feels different on screen. However, a pleasantly surprising finding was that an overwhelming 85% of students reported that they were very satisfied with tutoring online. Student engagement is the heart of what we do. During the finals week this past semester, we created a fun video to remind students that continue to offer support and assistance for them.
5. While our operation has continued remotely, we all miss the informal open-space setting and social interactions at the physical ACE. Adjusting to working from home also presented some challenges. With the usual boundaries between work and home blurred, we discovered that we often work more extended hours than normal and overcompensate for the lack of physical interaction and presence.
6. We are currently planning what a fall reopening will look like. Based on the limited information we have currently, and given that the majority of our classes are being offered in an online or hybrid modality, we believe that keeping a strong online presence via Microsoft TEAMS for tutoring is crucial in case we need to pivot completely back online at any point during the semester. There are two essential components of our planning, both of which involve flexibility: a) we need to be able to adapt all aspects of

our services and b) we need to be nimble enough to quickly return to a fully remote environment should it be necessary. Our whole team has demonstrated that we can pivot quite effectively based on the positive feedback from students expressed in our tutoring feedback survey.

We considered this unprecedented shift to online tutoring a tremendous growth opportunity for the ACE. Part of our team growing and learning together is also connecting with each other regularly on the Teams Platform. At our annual Think Tank Week, a much-awaited time when core staff come together to debrief about the previous semester and develop best practices, we focused not only on the technology/platform itself, but also on the development of the whole online tutoring environment, with particular emphasis on student engagement. For this online group training/debrief, we utilized Microsoft Teams as well as Padlet (a virtual bulletin board) to generate and discuss ideas.

We want to conclude with a note of appreciation to our NVCC President, the Dean of Academic Affairs and Associate Deans, department chairs and faculty, ACE captains, Educational Assistants, student tutors, and staff for their commitment to our students, as we work together to confront this unprecedented challenge. We recognize this endeavor will continue to require exceptional efforts, openness, and creativity on behalf of our faculty and the ACE Team.

***Acknowledgment:** We would like to express our deep appreciation to Dr. Lisa Dresdner, CEO of NVCC, for her valuable feedback during the final development of this publication.*

About the Authors



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Rob Sheftel has a Masters in Innovation in Technology from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He's also a proud graduate of Manchester Community College with an Associate's degree in Media Studies and Certification in desktop design. His key role at the ACE is leading and supporting a team of diverse and talented 60 plus tutors, academic coaches and Modified supplemental instruction leads across two campuses.

Showing We Care: What I Learned from Texting Students during the COVID-19 Shutdown

By Eric Sentell, Ph.D.
Southeast Missouri State University

I will never forget Thursday, March 12, 2020, my last day of class before spring break at Southeast Missouri State University, the day the Coronavirus finally scared me, the last day I saw my students face-to-face the rest of the semester. My university abruptly switched to remote delivery rather than allowing students to return from spring break. About a month later, the university asked for faculty volunteers to call fifty students from a list randomly generated by the Registrar, using a provided script as an outline. The purpose was to check-in and answer any questions the students might have. I thought, “Ugh, I don't have time, and I'm not doing it.” But then, I grudgingly decided to contact the students in my online classes who were struggling more than before and the students in my face-to-face classes who seemed to be having difficulty transitioning to remote delivery. Their home and cell phone numbers were conveniently listed on SupportNet, an internal online hub for student support and advising. I texted them, asking how they were doing, if they wanted to discuss extensions or late work, if they had any other questions, and, in particular, if they were aware of the university’s new “credit/no credit” grading option. Of my many adjustments to

remote delivery, texting these “AWOL” and struggling students turned out to be the most rewarding, practical, and effective. Such personal efforts may become a crucial part of higher education’s “new normal” for the foreseeable future.

While my emails to “AWOL” students often go unanswered or receive perfunctory replies, most of the students I texted responded, and all of those students were genuinely touched that I contacted them. One student wrote, “Thanks a lot for reaching out [sic] I’ve had a tough time since this has all started.” Another replied, “Thank you so much for reaching out to me. It means so much,” and then opened up about her stressors. A third concluded a lengthy update on her situation, “Thank you for checking in on me!” I have always emailed students who miss several classes or fail to submit assignments, and I regarded phone calls and texts as intrusions instead of alternatives. This experience texting students showed that they do not regard it as intrusive but instead view it as an expression of care. Their appreciation turned a task I assumed would be drudgery into a very rewarding and inspiring highlight of my career.

Contacting these students also helped me learn about specific disruptions and challenges they were facing that I would have been ignorant of otherwise. I knew most of my students worked either part-time or full-time and some had children, but I had no idea which was “essential workers,” who was working from home, who was simply stuck in the house, who was homeschooling, and who were binge-watching Netflix. In my first Zoom classes, I asked each student for an update on his or her situation so that I knew

who might face special challenges in completing work, but I still lacked insight into the students who missed those classes, who did not feel comfortable sharing their situation with everyone in a recorded Zoom session, and who were in my online classes. Thanks to our texting, I learned that one student had to find a place to live after campus closed, another was working even more hours at Walmart than before, and a third suffered significant mental and emotional stress from her family's dismissal of COVID-19's seriousness. The last student had talked about her familial conflicts over vaccinations and climate change during class discussions of rhetorical strategies, so I felt comfortable sharing some advice based on my familial conflicts over politics and science. She replied, "Thank you [sic] I appreciate it" along with the "praying hands" or "bowing salute" emoji.

One student also shared that some of her professors had moved their final exams up a week since everything would be online, a practice specifically prohibited by our university in any semester. Months earlier, she had requested time off from work during finals week, and now her schedule for the semester's last two weeks was a complete mess because, presumably, her other professors assumed all of their students had more time due to COVID-19 rather than less. If I had not sent a text of general concern, I would not have known what the student faced. I would not have been able to share the university's policy on the scheduling of final exams and advise the student on how to communicate with her other professors. Email could have achieved the same outcome, but

an overworked “essential worker” trying to juggle her job, classes, and home life would likely have taken far longer to check email than to notice a text notification. Students are notoriously bad at checking and reading email, but even when they do, texts may receive more timely responses. What mental, emotional, and practical costs would this student have borne in the meantime?

Several students I contacted were unaware of or confused about my university’s new “credit/no credit” grading option. The university informed students and faculty about the new policy through a mass email, and I sent class emails summarizing the pertinent points. To redress COVID-19’s impacts on coursework, the university decided that students would receive their grades as usual but then be able to choose “credit” instead of a “C” (or higher grade) or “no credit” rather than a “D” or “F.” The “credit” option would satisfy graduation and scholarship requirements, but it would not affect GPA. The “no credit” option would not satisfy any requirements but also would not affect GPA. The policy helped students to stay enrolled despite COVID-19’s potential impact on their coursework and grades; they could see where their final grades ended up and then choose “credit” or “no credit.” It was a brilliant, crucial adjustment.

Yet the university’s mass email and my class email had not sufficed to inform students about it. Students do not always read emails in the best of times, especially mass emails from university-level officials they have no relationship with. They do not always read all of an instructor’s email, especially the parts that do not directly concern their assignments.

Struggling, “AWOL” students are even worse at email. Clearly, a couple of emails for such a significant policy change simply will not do. The students who most needed to understand the “credit/no credit” option became familiar with it thanks to my texts. Our text-exchanges also showed that it may be better to send mass texts rather than mass emails. Services like Remind101, a group-texting system used by many high school teachers, can make texting an entire class very easy to set up.

As the chair of my department’s Recruitment and Retention Committee, I am always looking for ideas to recruit students to English and to retain them in our department and university. At some point, I realized that texting a few students during the spring’s pandemic could boost retention in the fall and beyond. Everyone likes to feel valued; everyone appreciates people who take the time to express care. Students love professors who convey genuine concern for their students and their success. If students feel their instructors care about them, then they will reap untold benefits to their mental and emotional health. They will also be more likely to continue their education if possible. For some programs, retaining even a handful more students could make the difference between financial health and ruin. A second wave of COVID-19 in the fall will make attending college more challenging for a host of reasons, and we need to give students as many reasons — and as much support — as possible to overcome those challenges.

As with the Great Recession, higher education budgets have taken a major blow from COVID-19 and will not fully recover for several years. Universities and colleges already faced declining enrollment for fall 2020 due to a smaller 18-25 demographic. Institutions, learning centers, and faculty must be ever more creative and adaptive to weather these challenges. I viewed the idea of calling students as a burden for me and an intrusion to them, but now I feel very differently. Simply calling or texting a few students could make the difference between those students' success and failure, their retention and their dropping out, our program's viability and demise, our institutions' vitality and withering. And besides, it never hurts to let people know we care and to receive their heartfelt appreciation in return.

About the Author



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Pouncing on the Opportunity

By JoJo Jacobson

Wentworth Institute of Technology

We were the first office on campus to see it coming.

In late February it was still seen as paranoia to talk about some virus halfway around the world impacting one's work, but Tom knew what I was referring to when I turned to him and asked "hey, do you ever take your work laptop home? I think I'm going to need you to start doing that. Just in case."

Tom is my Coordinator of Math Support in the center, and the two of us partner with everybody on campus in our tutoring operations, from department chairs to student clubs and organizations. In all of our conversations with different departments during late February, no one knew what would happen with the news of a pandemic looming, as though a giant new kind of storm were about to blow our worlds apart. Would the school have to send people home? What would happen to the staff? How would departments finish the semester? No one knew what would happen at that point, so the line was always "we'll wait and see." The news was getting worse hour by hour, and everyone on campus was just supposed to wait and see.

We decided to act.

I reached out to the chair of the science department to schedule a meeting. We brainstormed how to train instructors, we identified professors who were already leading the way in developing online material, and we started hatching plans to

help our students. Who had already developed instructional videos? Could we share those videos with students who were in classes with grandfatherly professors who had trouble just operating the photocopier machines? Could we get Grandpa to attend an online training session?

Tom researched the most effective platforms for online tutoring, and I reached out to our professional writing tutors to see whether they would be interested in working remotely. The headlines in the news were increasingly alarming, and by the time our spring break was supposed to start in the second week of March, professional tutors—as well as the department chairs and professors we partnered with—were relieved to see us making pandemic contingency plans.

There was only so much to be done in advance, but we were determined to do everything we could while we had the chance. I found myself pacing a lot during phone meetings and wondering about bizarre details, like what we would do with the office plants. As a STEM-focused school, we had to find a tutoring platform that would be useful for students coding and writing calculus equations and drawing chemical compounds; Google docs wouldn't cut it. We settled on a free platform called GoBoard that was recommended by colleagues in a STEM tutoring listserv; it was easily accessible and seemed like it could handle the traffic of all of our students suddenly shifting to online tutoring.

Before spring 2020, our office had barely begun to experiment with remote tutoring, offering a few phone sessions and GoToMeeting to help students in unusual circumstances. We had wanted to figure out a long term,

scalable solution for online tutoring requests, but it wasn't at the top of our priority list—until COVID-19. The pandemic heading towards us was forcing our office to ramp up online operations before we had a chance to test out all of our options; there were a lot of reasons why the situation was less than ideal. We had no new equipment and no extra funding, but we were determined to serve our students. I kept telling colleagues, “if a student needed help figuring out calculus before all of this, they're still going to need help now.”

When it hit, we were ready.

Our president finally sent the email letting us know we would switch to online work on the Wednesday of spring break. We contacted our peer tutors, we held synchronous online training, and we reached out to faculty and chairs in all the different departments with information on how students could access online tutoring, all before the week was over. We developed and distributed an “online student survival guide” infographic with tips from peer tutors the following week, which instructors and advisors sent to students.

The preparation and outreach started working. Our tutors had dozens of appointments in the first few days back, and attendance steadily grew. We saw some students utilize tutoring who had never accessed our services before; we had finally found a way to serve commuter students. As each day passed and students got the help they needed, it became more and more apparent: our hastily scraped together online tutoring operation was a success. Students were getting through their classes and mastering the course content, and

our tutors were there for them during their time of need. Students could log in and see a friendly face, ready to talk them through their essays and problem sets in one-on-one sessions, and students had a way to succeed even if they had a professor who struggled to deliver content in zoom lectures.

I joked with colleagues that although people were dying and it felt like the end of the world, there were a lot of silver linings to be had regarding the Covid-19 situation. We had finally developed a scaled-up online tutoring system, with online tutor training and synchronous and asynchronous materials for everything. We were reaching students, and our online tutoring system was flourishing!

The fact is, we were extremely lucky. No one in our office got sick, we all had access to decent wifi, and our school even had IT staff come to my porch to replace my work laptop when it broke. We were also primed for developing online resources. We saw the opportunity in the middle of the maelstrom of COVID response, and we jumped at it.

Moving forward, we are going to keep offering online tutoring, but we're also going to keep looking for action items, even during "wait and see" moments. Should we always act on paranoid instincts during unprecedented times? Maybe. But the lesson our office is taking away here is one we have always known, and one that continues to serve us well: always focus on finding new ways to help students learn. Regardless of the new storms that come our way, when our students need us, we'll be there.

About the Author



JoJo Jacobson is the Associate Director of the Center for Academic Excellence at Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston, Massachusetts. She is passionate about creating opportunities in higher education, and she has been working as a learning center professional for 12 years.

Making the Transition: In-Person to a Virtual Environment!

By Jack Truschel, Ed.,D, Psy.D.

Jan Hoffman, M.A.

East Stroudsburg University

"There is nothing permanent except change."

Heraclitus (544 BC – 483 BC)

Introduction

On March 13, 2020 it was announced by the president of the United States that there was a national emergency due to a worldwide pandemic. This pandemic was the COVID 19 virus, which according to the World Health Organization, is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Its spread through droplets of saliva, and touch and its spread was rapid throughout the world. On March 4, the television monitor indicating that there were 89,197 cases of COVID-19 worldwide, 45,175 people who recovered and 3048 deaths.

On the same day, this virus was called a novel coronavirus and that a vast majority of cases were located in mainland China.

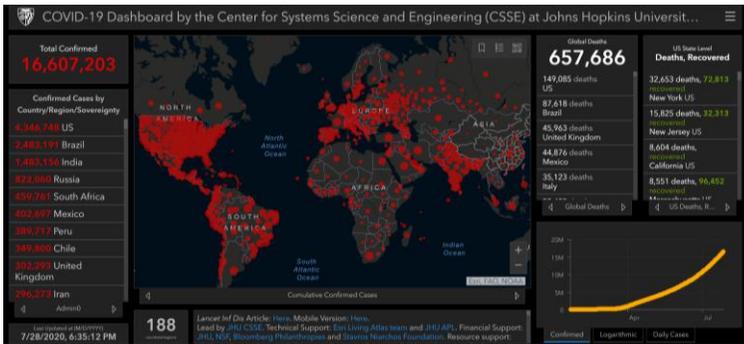


Fast forward to three months to June 23, 2020 and there are a total confirmed cases worldwide of 9,183,225, with 88 countries and total deaths 474,572. In little more than 3 months, there has been an additional 9,094,028 cases or almost a 103 times increase of the virus.

(<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>, June 23, 2020)



Finally, one month and five days later, there are over 16 million confirmed cases worldwide and 657,686 deaths <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> July 28, 2020. This is an increase of 7,423,978 infections.



The results of this pandemic has caused post-secondary education to radically change its approach to positively engaging students.

Transition

Chickering and Schlossberg, (2002) explained that transition is an event that creates a disruption of roles, or a change in a routine, and changes in relationships for the individual who is experiencing the change. A transition can cause an individual to develop a variety of feelings and behaviors such as anxiety, feelings and concerns about themselves and their future. A transition is a process that can take place immediately or over a long period of time. Most transitions have a beginning a middle and end. For students who were attending college in the spring semester 2020, this transition began in March and for most they completed the semester virtually. In the case of Covid 19, there is no middle and no end.... thus far. Sargent & Schlossberg, (1988), asks how does individual perceive this transition? The person can experience it as a positive experience, a negative experience or an unexpected experience. In this case, there were 127

students who completed a survey while on the phone (see appendix). A majority of these students reports that they were not satisfied with the experience and many of them “gave up” (academically) once the university decided that there was going to be a Pass / Fail (P/F) option for grades. Other questions about transitions include: was this transition at a good or poor time; is the transition perceived as something benefiting them or not and finally, is the transition something that was planned on or was it a genuine surprise?

A transition also depends on the situation in which the person finds themselves (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 51). In this case, it is a process of perception, how does the individual perceive the transition. Is the transition perceived as positive or negative? What is the timing of the transition and with this particular situation? Does the person view the transition as good timing or something else? Finally, is the transition voluntary or imposed? All of these concerns about the transitions can have a significant impact on the person. Of course, each person experiences the transition in a unique manner based on their personality during the time of the transition. Chickering and Schlossberg (1988), call this “the self”. “The self” is defined as the strengths or weaknesses the individual (Chickering and Schlossberg, 1988). The self takes into account the previous experiences of the person, the level of control the person has and if the person has grit or self-determination.

Call to Action

Spring break occurred at a regionally accredited, comprehensive and state owned university (the university) during the week of March 8th. During this week, it was decided by the administration that the university would extend spring break for another week. On March 19, 2020, it was decided that students would not be returning to the university and that members of the campus community would transition off campus. It was further decided that those who could work from home should prepared to do so as rapidly as possible. As the Director of Academic Advising and Exploratory Studies, a meeting of the advising team was called. The team decided that we can engage students via a virtual environment and determined that we would find various methods to engage students in a proactive manner. Due to the urgency of this transition, many members of campus were asked if they had access to laptops or desktops which had the ability to sign into the University systems. Some faculty and staff had to purchase items that would allow for student engagement. The Director of Academic Advising and Exploratory studies purchased a WAVLINK which supports a laptop computer to function very much like a desktop computer. This WAVLINK allowed for the use of a Surface computer which could easily be attached to a printer and to several screens as well as to the charging station. It allowed for multiple input devices as well such as a mouse, headset and various USB drives.

The University provided support to campus personal by enhancing the Virtual Private Network (VPN) allowing remote access to the computer systems. Personnel, through the use of the VPN were able to function as though they were in their office and had access the client management system as well as Starfish (which is a customer relationship management system) was used to update in order to assist students in an advising and coaching capacity. All campus web based systems were available i.e. D2L (academic content system) and email.

University personnel became aware that Covid 19 was fast becoming a worldwide issue the week prior to spring break. The timing from the President United States as well as leadership of the University resulted in the recommendation that students not return after spring break. This was unprecedented for the academy in this country. Students had to move out of their rooms, and faculty staff and management had to develop processes to support the student. This proved challenging to the academic advising staff who had never engage with students in a virtual manner. The transition to a virtual environment that supported students was a rapid process. It was decided that the staff would try several approaches to positively engage students.

In conducting some initial research, Generation Z (born in 1995 or later) are smartphone natives and savvy with mobile technology. Generation Z students like flexibility with learning, they are self-paced learners and can successfully adapt to online learning (Yu, 2000). Because of their familiarity with on line devices and programs, Generation Z

easily could transition to smartphones, tablets and similar devices (Ortiz and Green, 2019). It is almost part of their DNA! The learning management technology platform needs to be available 24 hours a day and is a driving source for teaching and learning for nearly all institutions of higher learning (Washington, 2019). Academic advising staff have the ability to coffer the ability to work with students virtual but a plan needed to be developed.

Technology Used

Some of the advising staff used D2L to engage students as though we were in a class. D2L is Desire2Learn and is an educational learning platform. A D2L page was set up and students' names were put into the system. Updates and student information was put in the general information area. Students were given assignments, key dates and emails were sent to students by way of this system.

Groupme was an app used by other members of the department. Groupme is free messaging group app. It allowed the advising team to message their advisees about the same information that was placed on D2L, but as an app on the phone, it allowed the student to get the information quickly.

Google voice was suggested as a means to contact students via phone without revealing personal cell phone numbers. It was found that students did not pick up a call from an unknown number, therefore, an email would be sent announcing the call. Starfish which is a customer relationship

management system (CRM) was used to update phone numbers and email addresses. It was also used to keep notes.

Email was used to keep contact with students on a regular basis. Students were emailed appointment times, alerts, information on university policies, the proposed pass fail policy, and registration information. It was further discovered that students often did not look at their university email, which is the official form of email. After a brief discussion, it was decided to email both the student at their official and unofficial email address.

Other issues included billing. Some students had a hold on their account and as a result could not register despite the work of the academic advisor or success coach. There were financial holds, math holds and judicial holes which had a negative impact on that process. All issues were reported to administration and the result is most of the issues related to the registration had been removed.

Lessons Learned

There were many lessons learned as a result of this virtual advising process. We found that there was no one specific method which was best in engaging students. Some of the advising team were happy that they had a Google number and used it to engage students. Many of the advising team used the app groupme. This app was difficult to use in the beginning since all of the team members advisees had to be entered into that system. Using D2L also had a similar downside. There was no way to easily upload your student lists into that system resulting in a substantial amount of

manual input. Tracking students was also an issue. Some of the staff used Excel spreadsheets in order to track activities with the student. Others built an access database with the hope that tracking students will become easier. Others enter the information to starfish, which seem to be the easiest method however at times, it was difficult connect to the VPN. When advising a student virtually, students had the opportunity to use zoom. The University assisted employees by establishing personal zoom rooms. Students often failed appointments and often would not have their live video on. Many students used zoom with just audio only. Doing advising and academic coaching in a virtual environment without seeing the student was somewhat difficult. The lack of having nonverbal communication such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact was challenging. It's was discovered that it was very difficult to coach a student without seeing how they respond to your queries. At the university, all students are required to see their advisor prior to registering for the next semester. Once a student sees their advisor or success coach, they receive a pin number. During the advising session, students reported having a very difficult time making the transition from real classroom environment to the virtual environment, and as a result were very resistant to engaging in advising / coaching activities. Students resisted phone calls, resisted emails, resisted making appointments and many reported that they did not feel comfortable with the virtual environment on any level. After students were advised or coached and were given a pin number, it was

discovered after a week to 10 days the students were not following through with registering for classes. Students also reported having anticipatory anxiety over Covid-19 and returning back to the university. It was determined that the advising / coaching staff should have an advising / coaching session with students and then should register the student for their classes in support of their fall semester. Once a student was registered by the advisor or success coach, they were provided information and were directed look into their banner account.

In all, moving to the virtual environment was challenging and difficult. It was recently announced by the university administration that we will be continuing virtually in the fall of 2020, therefore, stay tuned for more to come.

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Moving Forward Together

By Catherine Burton

Arkansas State University - Beebe

Let's be honest. Higher education professionals have known for a while now that the standard college experience doesn't work for everyone. Even community colleges are struggling to meet the needs of non-traditional students who don't have the time or money to take classes. The widespread idea that students are better off skipping college and foregoing student loan debt has impacted us all on some level.

Enrollment decreases and stricter guidelines on state and federal funding have already placed colleges in Arkansas, and the rest of the country, in a bind. So how in the world can we survive a pandemic? How do we retain students who never wanted to take online courses? And is it even possible to support those students without knowing what the next semester will bring?

“The past does not repeat itself, but it rhymes.” – Mark Twain

Arkansas State University – Beebe was created as a Junior Agricultural College in 1927. The tuition was \$7 per semester, and room and board cost \$11 per month. Through the Great Depression, the small college shared facilities and faculty with the local high school. Against all odds, the first graduating class was recognized in 1933.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, school buses were sent out to pick up students that could not afford to live on

campus. Despite record-high unemployment rates and crushing economic struggles, the growing college continued to meet the needs of local students. Granted, there were no Zoom meetings or Learning Management Systems, but I imagine the conversations had during that time sounded eerily similar to the conversations we are all having today.

“There are some things you learn best in calm, and some in storm.” – Willa Cather

The spring of 2020 was going to be something special for ASU-Beebe. Various committees across our four campuses were wrapping up huge projects that would impact enrollment, retention, and the overall student experience during the next several years. That was the plan. Two years of positive changes in leadership, organizational structure, and shared governance had culminated in the finalization of projects that included a new enrollment management plan, updates to the Institutional Strategic Plan, and the Student Success Council assessment plan.

Timelines had been set. Project assignments had been made to the appropriate parties. Enrollment goals had been approved. Everything was to be accomplished in a structured environment by teams who were already starting to work well together. Like most projects in higher education, the upcoming fall semester would be crucial.

Then came the realization that everything was going to look very different than we expected. Our new focus was on the health and safety of students, employees, and the community. Faculty had to move entire programs online. Student services had to begin serving students remotely, and

students had to figure out how to attend an online college almost overnight.

As a community college, we faced a unique task.

Switching a Chemistry Lab to an online format is indeed challenging, but a significant portion of our students are in hands-on technical programs. These programs range anywhere from medical services to equipment technology. Losing a semester of hands-on EMT or Paramedic coursework with a mentor and realistic simulation technology can be the pivotal factor on a final licensure exam.

As the only college in the state to offer associates degrees in Veterinary Technology and Agricultural Equipment Technology, many of our instructors had to work independently and very quickly. Other programs and courses required massive student projects like theatrical productions and costume design or welding and computerized machining projects.

“No one would have crossed the ocean if he could have gotten off the ship in the storm.” – Charles Kettering

As our faculty and students were learning new ways of connecting and learning, the rest of the college faced a slightly different challenge. Which services are essential? How many people must remain on campus to keep the computer labs and library open? How do we protect our employees while still serving our students?

It was decided that, along with a few other offices, the Advising and Learning Centers on three of our campuses would remain open to serve students without the technology or internet capabilities to maintain online courses. Currently, a

few employees have remained on campus to monitor and clean the labs, while all advisors and tutors work remotely.

New Student Advising was a service that was added to the Advising and Learning Center two years ago. During those two years, the onboarding process was designed to work for on-campus students as well as online students. Therefore, the shift to remote advising was not a difficult transition.

Advising appointments were already being scheduled using Calendly. Any paper New Student Intake Forms were switched to an Office 365 format that could be emailed before the appointment, and the contents of the New Student Advising Folder (campus map, instructions for accessing the Portal, and guides for direct deposit) were turned into a PDF format for email.

Advisors used already existing Zoom accounts to have structured appointments with students. With the use of screen-sharing and virtual “face-to-face” communication, new student enrollment numbers are already tracking at a similar pace to this time last year.

Tutoring was a significant challenge for many students in a remote environment. The Advising and Learning Center had recently introduced an online Canvas tutoring lab specifically dedicated to online tutoring; however, not all students were receptive to the option. The most popular pieces of the Tutoring Lab were the instructional videos and the appointment scheduling tool (Calendly) for virtual tutoring appointments.

One unexpected result of switching to remote tutoring during mid-semester was that some students were already familiar with one or two specific tutors. Several students

reached out by email to those tutors continually simply because of the personal connections that had already been built. This led to the plan of having the other tutors proactively contact the students they had been recently seeing in the lab.

The Library, Counseling Office, Testing Office, and Residence Life Office have also been working diligently to completely change their available services while still protecting students and employees. Available cleaning supplies were funneled to the necessary departments; Resident Assistants in housing received additional training and support, and remote testing protocols were implemented for spring and summer.

Interestingly, not one single office has been closed. Phones are still ringing. Students are still registering. And a very impressive virtual graduation was live-streamed on May 9th, 2020... Eighty-seven years after the first graduating class in Beebe.

“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.” – Henry Ford

From the moment that an understanding settled on the potential impact of Covid-19 in higher education, I’ve heard one consistent message: We will never be able to go back to the way things were before this happened. The typical slow-moving implementation of change has been tossed aside out of necessity. We now know that we can work from home. We now know that some of our courses can be taught in a different format. Hopefully, our students know that we will always work to support their best interests.

It is frustrating that we must rework the timelines of enrollment plans and start again on data collection for assessment models that were created before this year. It is terrifying to think that no one knows what the next semester will hold. Most importantly, it is sobering to think about the losses, struggles, and uphill battles being faced in society today. The silver lining is that we know the value of education, and we have already started to see how quickly we can adapt.

This is our chance to reassess and rebuild higher education into something that works for more students. We can use what we have learned this year to increase accessibility with the use of technology inside the classroom and within our support services. As for ASU-Beebe, we will continue the work that began in 1927 with a growth-mindset and a student-centered focus on transforming lives.

About the Author



Catherine Burton serves as Director of Advising and Learning at Arkansas State University – Beebe. She earned a Bachelors in Social Work from ASU and a Master of Science in College Student Personnel from ATU. Burton has worked in higher education for over 10 years. She is an active member in the Arkansas Student Affairs Association (ArSAA) and recently completed a three-year presidential term on the ArSAA Executive Board.

Webster University's Academic Resource Center

By Erica Ellard
Webster University

Webster University's Academic Resource Center (ARC) has always focused on assisting students, faculty, and staff, and in March 2020, the ARC was well-positioned to adapt our already existing student academic supports to navigate COVID-19 challenges.

The ARC provides the following student academic supports:

- Academic Counseling
- Academic integrity awareness and education programs
- Assistive technology
- Disability accommodations and support
- Testing Center
- Transitions Program
- Tutoring Program
- Writing and Online Writing Center

In the list above, there are likely some nuanced questions about exactly what we cover in our academic integrity programs and specifically who we serve in our tutoring program, etc., but the areas that need significant explanation are likely two:

1. Academic Counseling – This service provides professional team members to work with students on a one-on-one basis to support those students and

work with them on anything that affects them academically. Often, Academic Counseling meetings focus on note-taking skills, study skills, test-taking skills, time management, etc., but just as often, they focus on how to navigate a challenging situation or conversation with their professor, how to access a University technology resource, how to request additional Financial Aid support, who to contact with a specific question or need, how to connect to other resources or offices, and more.

2. Transitions Program – This program is a first-semester program designed to provide additional support to conditionally-admitted first-time freshmen and conditionally-admitted transfer students who are transferring in fewer than 30 credit hours. The program’s features include the following:
 - a. A summer Transition and Academic Prep (TAP) program where students meet their peers; learn about University resources, technologies, and expectations; meet professors and current Webster University students; experience the classroom and earn three free academic credits, and get connected to the University.
 - b. Weekly Academic Counseling appointments during the fall semester.
 - c. Enrollment in PSYC 1000: Learning Strategies.
 - d. A reduced course load during the fall semester. The standard is 13 credit hours (Webster University’s requirement for

institutional financial aid), but some programs must take more credits while still keeping Transitions students below the program norm.

Who We Serve

In addition to the diversity and breadth of these wonderful programs and services, the reach of the ARC is wide, broad, and diverse. Webster University is a worldwide institution with its main campus in Webster Groves (St. Louis), Missouri, USA, and with locations throughout the United States; fully online program offerings; and campuses in seven non-US countries. Students studying at these locations or via these modalities include graduate and undergraduate students, traditional and non-traditional students, fully-accepted and conditionally-accepted students, and more. The Academic Resource Center serves and supports *all* of these students, locations, and modalities and also supports all of Webster University's faculty and staff members.

To be more specific, all ARC services, except for two, are available to the worldwide Webster community. The two services that support smaller populations are as follows:

1. Testing Center – Students in the St. Louis area may use the Testing Center whether they are studying at the Webster Groves campus, the Gateway (downtown St. Louis) campus, or another St. Louis location *or* whether they are an online student who lives in or is visiting the St. Louis area.
2. Transitions Program – This program is specifically for students at the Webster Groves campus. While

other Webster University locations can and have built similar programs, the program as it exists at the Webster Groves campus only supports Webster Groves students.

Rising to the Challenge – Spring 2020

As the United States began locking down in March 2020, Webster University was actually on Spring Break. The University announced that all classes would complete the spring 2020 semester remotely, and during the next week, the University moved to remote operations, having all staff members who were able to do so work remotely as well.

Like so many other institutions of higher education – and many other companies, too, most likely – Webster University had to offer and provide much training and support to move employees and customers (students) to remote operations. So, as courses were moved to a remote format, technology, and pedagogical training and support was first and foremost. The Academic Resource Center team adapted its services to provide additional support for faculty, other staff members, and students during this time of high need – and continues to do so as of the writing of this article in July 2020. These needs are unlikely to diminish shortly, but the wonderful benefit of this situation is that all members of the University community are learning more about and engaging more with technology, often leading to increased communications and collaborations as well.

While providing additional support, beyond the norm, to these areas of training for faculty, staff, and students, the ARC continues to provide high-quality student academic supports and to communicate and promote the availability of those

supports and resources, how to access them, etc. The ARC team has adapted to working and meeting with students and colleagues remotely; we have built out additional resources and added them to our website and Webster University's Knowledge Center, a "course" within our learning management system (Canvas) where faculty training and resources are offered; and we have met students and colleagues where they are, offering presentations within faculty and student open office hours to capitalize on partnerships throughout the organization that have been developed to leverage access, resources, and training.

One area where we were uniquely positioned to rise to the challenge of spring 2020 was with our tutoring and writing supports. As a global institution, we had already pursued tutoring options that would provide additional support to our students in every area of the globe, and we had been fortunate to partner with NetTutor in 2019 to provide professional online tutoring and writing support to our students. This partnership launched fully in late June 2019, and the resource was welcomed and well-used from the onset. Having NetTutor available to support students as we moved to fully remote instruction and remote operations in early 2020 was essential.

NetTutor was particularly important to tutoring support during the first part of our remote operations because our peer tutors were told they could not work remotely for a short period. Luckily, we were able to bring peer tutors back onto the schedules in April 2020.

Our peer writing coaches had the same experience as our tutors and could not work remotely for a few weeks. However, as the Academic Resource Center (ARC) does provide an Online Writing Center, our students had access to writing support even without NetTutor. Luckily, though, students could also use NetTutor for writing assistance.

Our Academic Counseling, academic integrity, assistive technology, disability accommodations and support, and Transitions Program were all able to function remotely as well, meeting with students and employees and providing the same quality of support and care. Only our Testing Center could not run during remote operations. We did explore remote proctoring options, but we have not found them to be feasible at this time.

In other areas, we were able to go above that “normal” quality and care, though. One example is that we developed a report by which we could reach out to students who had not logged into our learning management system in a week or more. We provided outreach by phone, primarily, and by email, secondarily, and attempted to reach out and support our students who may be in need. We worked to reengage these students individually, answer their questions, provide them with technology if they needed electronic devices or access to the Internet, etc. This work resulted in several success stories.

Rising to the Challenge – Summer 2020

Our work is never done! The Academic Resource Center Team continues its work year-round, and summer 2020 has been no exception. This summer, Webster University’s classes

continue to be offered remotely, but plans are being made to resume some on-ground courses in fall 2020. Those on-ground plans include a return to campus operations – though with modifications to ensure safety, social distancing, etc.

To complicate the situation further, this summer and as we lead up to fall 2020, the Academic Resource Center is undergoing renovations and expansion to provide a more inviting and accessible space for students. This work is expected to be completed a couple of weeks following the start of the fall 2020 semester.

Thus, as some units are beginning to return to on-campus operations, the ARC team remains remote, in large part, during our renovations. The one exception is, again, the Testing Center. To provide students with the language placement exams, business waiver exams, CLEP and DANTE exams, etc., that they need to register properly and/or complete their degrees and graduate, we reopened the Testing Center, in a temporary space, in early July 2020. Because that space is a classroom space, we will not be able to use it much beyond July, but we are doing what we can to support students in the time and space available to us.

While we will likely have a period in August 2020 when we will not be able to proctor testing, we will reopen in our renovated space as soon as possible to continue to provide students with the aforementioned exams as well as to, once again, proctor course exams and accommodated testing as the University will have on-ground courses in fall 2020.

As we navigate renovations and planning for fall in a COVID-19 era, we continue to support and outreach to

students, faculty, and staff. In mid-June, the Academic Resource Center team further supported and outreached to students, faculty, and staff because of some technology issues the University had experienced that required each community member to take action(s) to resolve the situation. Yes, Academic Counseling *does* include *anything* that impacts a student academically, and technology issues are high on that list!

Closing Thoughts

Webster University, like most institutions of higher education, has been working to support students – and employees – during this difficult time. We have provided additional student funding resources, processed refunds for Spring housing and meal plans, purchased more electronic devices to have available to check out to students, investigated ways to ensure more software is accessible to students remotely (e.g., not in the physical classroom/on-campus), and more. Much of this work continues because, while we're returning some classes to on-ground delivery, there is no guarantee that we won't have to go remote again – or that some students or faculty won't have to engage remotely for, at least, a period.

There are no easy answers to where we are or where we are going except that we want to continue to meet our missions and serve our students and communities. And, hopefully, we can all stay safe and healthy in the process.

Webster University's Mission

Webster University, a worldwide institution, ensures high-quality learning experiences that transform students for global citizenship and individual excellence.

Academic Resource Center's Mission

The Academic Resource Center provides academic resources, support, advocacy, and access through relationships that empower students across the worldwide Webster University community.

Photos of the Space



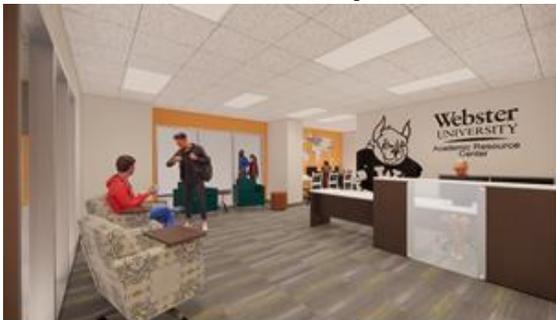
Inside the ARC



Inside the Old HR Conference Room



Inside the old HR space



Architectural rendering of the lobby



The outer hallway



Architectural rendering of the Academic Resource Center

About the Author



Erica Ellard is the Director of the Academic Resource Center (ARC) at Webster University. She is also the Starfish project co-lead for the University and serves on many committees, working groups, and task-forces at the University. Her primary additional responsibilities in this COVID-19 era include serving on the Academic Continuity & Support Working Group, for which she is the lead in the area of Student Support; maintaining efforts for Fall 2020 registration with the Undergraduate Retention Working Group; personally supporting electronic device check-out to students in need of electronic devices; and building out Starfish tracking items and success plans to best support Webster's students and initiatives during COVID-19.

Proud

By Stephanie Hopkins

Missouri Southern State University

Proud. If I had to choose one word to say how I feel about the response of our tutors and staff to the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be “proud.” While we already had an online tutoring program in place, it wasn’t heavily used. We educated all of our tutors each semester on how to tutor online, and sometimes a tutor would get a request to do so, but online tutoring was not the norm for us. In March 2020, all of that changed in an instant. Our tutors, who are all students themselves, went home for spring break. We had no idea that they wouldn’t return to campus in person for the remainder of the semester. However, as we reached out to them to explain that we would be going all online for all tutoring for the remainder of the semester, we did not hear one complaint. Not one.

Online tutoring requests were slow at first. However, throughout the remainder of the semester, requests steadily picked up in pace and our tutors helped as best they could in their “new” tutoring world. Amazingly, everything went like clockwork. It was as if we’d been doing things this way from the beginning. Our tutors faced this challenge with ease and grace. They kept in constant communication. They sent pictures of themselves tutoring from their home offices. And the Student Success Center staff also rose to the challenge. Creating new ways of doing things on the fly while working

from home was no easy task, but we got it done. I am proud of the staff, too.

Tutoring is important. It can create community, support, and normalcy for students, camaraderie, a shoulder to cry on when classes are tough, and so much more. Without tutoring, many students simply would not graduate. Our tutors know this and are the backbone of our program. Without them, we could not do what we do. Proud. I am so proud of all of the staff and tutors of the Student Success Center. What a team!

About the Author



Stephanie Hopkins began her career at Missouri Southern State University in 1995 and has served as the Director of the Student Success Center since 2011. She currently serves as the recording secretary for the National College Learning Center Association and as the president-elect for the Missouri College Learning Center Association.

Stories from the Texas A&M University Academic Success Center: Levity during COVID-19

**By Tyler Laughlin
Lindsey Randolph
Texas A & M University**

“I love you too!” It’s what I reflexively said to my son after he told me he loved me. And then, to my horror, I remembered that I was still in the middle of a student appointment on Zoom. Fortunately, my student was very understanding and realized that I did not love them. This is just one of many embarrassing moments that has happened to most of us at the Texas A&M University (TAMU) Academic Success Center (ASC). This is not unique to TAMU, as the challenges that all academic institutions have faced nationwide during the Covid-19 pandemic have been anything but normal. Luckily, ASC employees felt some confidence in the transition to working from home, as online academic coaching and tutoring had both been piloted in earlier years; however, all of us were woefully unprepared for scenarios that emerged from Zoom meetings, virtual chats, tutoring, and online classes with students in the comforts of their rooms.

The stories of academic coaching and classes are those of adaptation, humor, awkwardness, and stress. How exactly do you adapt when your Zoom meeting starts and the video feed

only shows a lap, a shirtless student, or a student lying in bed with the phone propped up on the pillow beside? It turns out that very timely “unstable internet connections” were great reasons for a video feed to cut out suddenly. We saw countless cats behaving badly and dogs questioning their owners’ decisions to work and not play. What could be so much more important on a computer than playing and food? If you’ve ever told a joke during a meeting or teaching, and you felt like you were the only one laughing at it, online appointments have confirmed our worst fears. Most of us will still take blank faces over name-only, black boxes, if only for the subtle feedback of “it wasn’t funny.” Of course, the opposite is true when YOU are the meeting attendee, and you finally realize how much your facial expressions say when you hear something objectionable. The worst possible staff meeting has to be one where everyone is always looking directly at your face, and I believe we all discovered a new nervousness in making sure our webcams were off, and that we weren’t accidentally sharing the wrong screen.

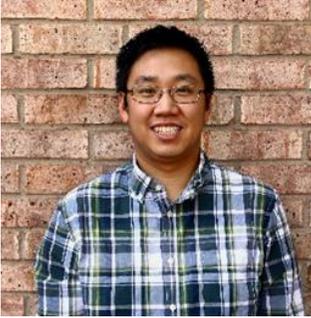
Tutoring conducted by the ASC also faced its unique challenges, similar to that of the academic coaches. Our tutor coordinator was out of the country from March 6-15, with limited email access, and learned of the university transition to online learning as soon as she returned. One of the first questions she asked on her return was, “what is social distancing?” She also very quickly determined how many Zoom meetings in a day were TOO many. For most of us, one meeting a day is probably one too many, but six (!) in a day is draining. They may seem innocent and perhaps even

frivolous, but Zoom meetings take much more energy than any of us anticipated.

Student tutors are also not immune to the perils of Zoom. One of our experienced tutors was monitoring Zoom to assign tutors and students to breakout rooms when his alarm went off to wake up his girlfriend from her nap. She had requested that he sing “Rise and Shine” to wake her up, and true to his word, he rose from his seat to croon her. “Dude! Dude, your microphone is still on!” was what he heard as he turned around to see a dozen tutors and students smiling, smirking, and choking from laughter.

In addition to the levity of our embarrassing situations, our stories, like so many others, are also ones of incredible success during constantly shifting expectations. Despite all of our hilarious, awkward, and cringe situations, the TAMU ASC staff has learned how to do our jobs better and in ways, we had never considered. None of us knew what to expect with such rapid transitions. Some things worked without a hitch; others, like this collection of stories from the TAMU staff, required a little more patience, creativity, and humor. As we continue to adapt, learn, and make mistakes through the fall semester, remember that we are all in this together, and to share your stories of successes and failures with each other.

About the Authors



Tyler Laughlin is an Academic Coach for the Texas A&M University Academic Success Center. He has been coaching at the ASC since 2018 and has taught in higher education for 8 years. He loves to see students succeed and was the 2020 New Advisor Award recipient.



Lindsey Randolph is the Program Coordinator for Tutoring at Texas A&M University's Academic Success Center. She joined the ASC in 2015 after her introduction to Supplemental Instruction and student support initiatives at Louisiana State University. She was the 2020 recipient of the Student Employee Impact Award and the 2020 Innovative Advising Award.

How Foresight and Collaboration Made a Fully-Online Transition Seamless

By Melissa Berry

University of Alabama in Huntsville

Background

The Student Success Center (SSC) started online tutoring in fall 2017 as a pilot program using peer tutors and Zoom teleconferencing software. In fall 2018, every available tutoring appointment was available to students both online and in person. Our Supplemental Instruction Program, known as PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) piloted online PASS with one online course and by fall 2019, we had added PASS online as an option for some on-ground courses. Also, the Student Success Center has its Canvas course in which all undergraduate students, faculty, and some staff are enrolled.

UAH is a Zoom campus and all of our tutors are trained on Zoom before each semester begins. The training is both lecture-style and hands-on. Tutors are trained on profile settings, security, and Zoom features. PASS leaders who have online PASS sessions are given a Pro account so they can have breakout rooms, conduct polls, and other features needed when conducting a Zoom meeting with multiple users.

The SSC professional staff consists of the Director, PASS Coordinator II, Group Study Programs Coordinator, Tutoring Programs Coordinator, Virtual Learning Coordinator, and a Staff Assistant. When news of Coronavirus hitting the United States broke, and with the strong possibility of all classes

being moved online, it was truly a collaborative, coordinated effort to ensure that we continued to give our students the academic support they have come to expect from us. Our transition from in-person or online to all online was the definition of teamwork. As tensions were high across campus, every staff member of the SSC worked diligently and saw a transition to fully online that could not have possibly run any smoother than it did.

This is a chronology of what occurred to get all SSC services online:

Wednesday, March 4, 2020

- UAH cancels all university-sponsored international travel departing during March.

Thursday, March 5, 2020

- SSC Director, Valerie Johnson, directs the staff to brainstorm how we will continue our operations in supporting our students should all classes move online.

Friday, March 6, 2020

- We realize we need to determine if our tutors and PASS leaders have their device and viable internet service to host a Zoom meeting should they need to leave campus.
- We also determine that all PASS leaders who are not currently offering PASS online will need a Pro account and a quick training on how to hold an online PASS session.

- Academic Technologies staff change PASS leader Zoom profiles from Basic to Pro.
- A communication plan is produced to inform students and faculty of the SSC's transition to online.

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

- Tutors and PASS leaders are sent a survey asking if they have a device and viable internet to conduct a Zoom meeting from home.
 - All tutors and PASS leaders respond within 24 hours.
- PASS leaders are requested to follow the process of creating a recurring meeting link.
 - All PASS leaders respond within 24 hours.

Thursday, March 12, 2020

- We are notified that as of Monday, March 16, 2020, all classes will be delivered online.
- All tutors and PASS leaders are informed that beginning Sunday, March 15 we will begin delivering all of our services online as well.
- PASS leaders who have never had an online session are encouraged to meet together to get practical experience with the software and were provided with online session strategies from experienced PASS leaders.
- All student workers are encouraged to email or call the Virtual Learning Coordinator or the Director if they have any technical issues with Zoom meetings.

Friday, March 13, 2020

- Our communication plan is enacted which consists of the following:
 - Direct email to anyone who currently has a scheduled tutoring appointment
 - Email via Canvas from PASS leaders to students enrolled in their courses
 - Announcement on the front page of the SSC website
 - Direct email to every student who has used our services
 - Direct email to all faculty whose courses are supported by the SSC
 - Social media announcement
 - Add a module to the Student Success Center Canvas page

Sunday, March 15, 2020

- All SSC services begin fully online

Due to our staff working collaboratively, our learning center made a smooth transition to fully online. We have experienced Zoom users and had the foresight to prepare as transitioning fully online became a very real possibility.

About the Author



Melissa Berry is the Virtual Learning Coordinator at the Student Success Center (SSC) at the University of Alabama Huntsville (UAH). She is responsible for integrating programs online and promoting the SSC on campus. Melissa holds a B.S.B.A. from UAH, and has presented at NDLW, UASI, and NCLCA.

Creating Community in Isolation

By Keigh-Cee Bell

Southwestern Michigan College

Melissa Thomas

GoBoard by Tutor Matching Service

Learning center administrators are inherently isolated, typically with only one full-time administrator in the department. The COVID-19 pandemic isolated us even further - there was no prospect of conferences or networking opportunities, and while many organizations were offering webinars and other helpful services, there was a lack of discussion and community. Suddenly, we were asked to rethink how we offer services, to change our processes, and do it all with no training, no time, and no budget. Best practices are limited, and while there was an uptick in posts on LRNASST and other listservs, the back and forth became cumbersome and hard to follow. We needed a dedicated space to have back and forth discussion, to bounce ideas off of others, and to share our experiences and successes with online tutoring.

We both had been working diligently to figure out online tutoring over the past few years, and since our work was going smoothly, we both felt an inherent sense of duty to create a place and space for everyone to share their ideas and ask questions so we didn't have to individually recreate the wheel with this sense of immediacy. We sought various creative and evolving ways to make ourselves available to our

learning assistance colleagues and start a productive, real-time conversation about online tutoring. We shared what works for us, we asked questions and advice from others, and most importantly, created an open space for others to do the same.

Melissa started a LinkedIn Group for Online Tutoring several years back but it never took off, probably because in our field we don't use LinkedIn for professional development, but instead for job searches. Melissa also held monthly GoBoard Zoom Meetings at a consistent date and time (third Thursday of the month at 1 pm Central) for the last few years that had consistent attendance. These meetings were created for GoBoard administrators so that they could receive updates on the software and the technology roadmap. Each month these meetings highlight one school and their innovative practice, plus create a space for open discussion. What's nice about these recurring meetings is that no one has to manage them, they register through Zoom and receive reminders and notifications that way.

But Melissa and the GoBoard team felt this wasn't enough, so they started a Google Group just for online tutoring and invited everyone that receives their newsletter. Very soon afterward, Keigh-Cee Bell fell into a facilitator role after someone on the LRNASST listserv suggested a Zoom meeting to discuss online tutoring. Keigh-Cee volunteered to facilitate the meeting, and across the two initial meetings, almost 300 people attended and participated. It was clear that learning center administrators needed a place to collaborate and share ideas in an open dialogue, and while a listserv is a great place to ask questions, full conversations can become cumbersome.

Keigh-Cee started a Discord server as a supplemental means of communicating--one where you don't have to worry about flooding everyone's mailboxes and where you can ask and answer questions for specific users and instances.

Discord, a free chat server that is popular in gaming communities, has become a powerful tool in the learning center community. It allows students to easily ask questions and creates a space for community among learning center staff. Keigh-Cee started using Discord in the Teaching and Learning Center at Southwestern Michigan College and thought it might be a good platform for learning center professionals to come together and share experiences and ask questions in a more synchronous environment. As of August 2020, there are 436 members on the Learning Center Professionals Discord Server. The server is broken up into categories and channels, so the conversations are more organized and you can choose which conversations you would like to participate in. Some of the channels include technology for online learning, data, LMS, scheduling, how to train tutors, virtual manuals, returning to campus, and more. There is also a section for regional networking and a watercooler channel where members can start conversations that are not related to learning centers and form friendships. For example, in the watercooler channel, LGBTQIA+ members have found a community and shared personal histories and stories for pride month.

The aforementioned Zoom meetings have also blossomed and brought the learning center community together. What

started as a one-time meeting quickly turned into weekly sessions where groups as large as 150 members come together virtually to ask questions, share experiences, and offer expertise. The Zoom meetings are not formal training or webinars; they are loosely facilitated conversations. We are all facing challenges that could not be foreseen, and there is no “one size fits all” solution. Learning center administrators are working within the bounds of their institutions, student expectations, and previous experiences, so what works for one center may not work for another, so rather than one person presenting the solution that worked for them, the learning center community needed a place to bounce ideas, ask questions, and explore possibilities. There is no agenda for these meetings. No one is trying to sell a product or service; instead, it is a group of people who feel isolated coming together to connect and share. The Zoom meeting topics are decided based on the votes of the group. Topics have included virtual tutor training, returning to campus, online pedagogy and andragogy, anti-racism and bias training, and some vendor information sessions at the request of the group. All meetings are also recorded and shared in Discord for those who cannot attend.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives, both personally and professionally, and has challenged us in unprecedented ways. But these challenges can be a vehicle for positive change. Historically, higher education has been resistant or slow to change or adapt to new technologies and student needs, but the pandemic has forced many institutions to reimagine online learning, or consider it for the first time.

Professors were forced to examine the way their courses were delivered and assessments were given. Many learning centers were tasked with figuring out how to assist students with no time or budget to implement change. It was a monumental task--and it isn't done. COVID-19 will change the landscape of higher education for the foreseeable future, and likely for the better. In our "new normal" we are more adaptive to student needs, more informed about the technology available to us and how to best use it, and most importantly, we have a community of colleagues that can help. The pandemic broke us out of our silos and allowed us to work together in ways we couldn't have predicted, and the impacts of this shift will outlast the virus.

About the Authors



Keigh-Cee Bell is the Coordinator of the Carole A. Tate Teaching and Learning Center at Southwestern Michigan College. She has her MFA in Creative Writing from American University and is a former writing consultant and English instructor. Keigh-Cee is passionate about institutional technology and working with at-risk populations to help them succeed.



Melissa Thomas has 16 years of experience in learning assistance, serving in numerous capacities, from SI leader to academic coach. She was the Director of the College of Charleston's Center for Student Learning and a Past President of CRLA. Currently, she works for Study Edge heading up their division that includes Tutor Matching Service, GoBoard, and Tutor Essentials.

Making Hay

By Martha Neth

Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design - Denver

We were lucky. We already had the infrastructure in place. More than half of our students are online-only, so our student learning center (SLC) has a lot of online appointments. The issue was not that. Thanks to my prepared staff, we had an announcement out to our students the day the school announced we were moving completely online.

The bigger issue was that our ground classes were moving online and we are an art school. We have studio classes. We have some faculty entrenched in face-to-face synchronous education. Since our role is to support students AND faculty, I decided to embed a tutor in each of the classes switching modalities.

The secret is that I have been wanting to do this since I started this job a year and a half ago. If I had attempted embedded tutors before this crisis there would have been meetings and conversations and push-back. But just as I suspected embedding tutors has been a huge success. I have had nothing but positive reactions from faculty and students. Also, I am continuing the program but switching the embedded classes to the first-year program in all modalities, rather than just the former ground classes. I am trying to look at the crisis as a benefit for all our students and a way to do what we have been wanting to do all along.

Flexibility

By Diana Garland

Missouri State University

What word describes 2020—spring, summer, and fall? I’d say its flexibility. This spring, due to the COVID crisis, our students at Missouri State were granted one week extra for spring break while faculty and staff worked to move the last five weeks of the semester online. For me, as the Director of the Learning Commons, along with the Director of Student Services, as we jointly provided academic support services under the title of the “Bear CLAW” (Center for Learning and Writing), every day brought a new change. My department’s focus is on tutoring services. Once our face-to-face tutors were set to tutor online, due to new budget constraints, we had to release all 50 tutors. We were then reassigned 50 graduate assistants who had previously been teaching assistants. After about two weeks of behind-the-scene work with those new graduate assistants, we were able to provide tutoring services totally online using TutorTrac and Blackboard Collaborate. Previous to the spring semester, we had one online tutor per semester assisting with a lower-level mathematics course. All other tutoring needs that students had away from the campus had been minimal and handled on an individual basis.

With permission to use our regular face-to-face tutors online, the summer semester was an easy switch to provide tutoring services only online for our online summer session. For the fall semester we are being asked to be flexible again.

Classes are being planned for on-campus attendance, with a required Blackboard component. No longer will we have drop-in tutoring tables; all tutoring services will be by appointment only. We will no longer have Sunday afternoon/evening tutoring in our space; Sunday will also be only online. All tutors will be required to have at least two appointment hours online. At this point, the University is still in the process of making plans for a potential masking policy. In addition to evening cleaning by university staff, our student employees will be responsible for cleaning the spaces they use in our area. The hope is that we can set up and assign specific spaces tutors can use for online tutoring or, if allowed, face-to-face tutoring.

The emergency planning committee originally told us to continue only online in the fall, but after consideration for trying to make the university experience as normal as possible, the committee reviewed our space and is now providing us guidance on social distancing and space use. Two open-space, heavy-interaction areas are being fitted with acrylic shields and social distancing decals. Our two-credit-hour First Year Foundations course has been condensed to a first-of-the-semester, eight-week course, with two hours face-to-face and two hours in Blackboard per week. By providing it in this format, we believe our new freshmen will have a good foundation and the knowledge to use Blackboard in the event of another crisis. I greatly missed saying good-bye to our seniors, but I will welcome the new freshmen to campus with a huge smile under my mask.

About the Author



Diana Garland, Ed.D., is the Director of the Learning Commons at Missouri State University. As an administrator at MSU for over 30 years she has been responsible for program management in the Learning Commons (Tutoring Services), International Student Services, and Academic Outreach & Distance Learning programs.

As a per course lecturer, she has taught at both the undergraduate and graduate level. She had taught Student Success courses for over 15 years. Dr. Garland is a past president of the Missouri Distance Learning Association and the Missouri College Learning Center Association. An active member of NCLCA she is a Certified Learning Center Professional – Level 3 and currently the Professional Development Officer for NCLCA. She currently serves as the CRLA Heartland chapter secretary. On the MSU campus she serves as a Master Advisor, Bear Connection Mentor, and as a University Staff Ambassador. She has served on program review committees on-campus and as an external reviewer for other institutions, as well as, a grant reviewer for the Department of Labor. She has an MBA from Missouri State University and an EdD in Educational Leadership from the University of Missouri – Columbia.

Leading Tutors to Empowered Solutions

By Stephanie Marchetti

Mount Wachusett Community College

While understandably intimidating, leading through change is something I view as an exciting opportunity to pilot ideas that otherwise may not have come to fruition. Within my institution, there was no precedent for remote work of any kind and therefore it was not often (perhaps, ever) permitted. However, overnight that all changed, and we immediately sprang into action. Online tutoring launched within a week! Supplemental instruction moved into Blackboard within two weeks! Staff meetings were implemented and run via Zoom! Already crowded email inboxes overflowed with listserv requests for strategies and best practices! Through much upheaval, compelling opportunities emerged, and I was invigorated by the challenge to change.

Tutoring and supplemental instruction are all housed under the Academic Support Center at the medium-sized New England community college where I serve as the Director of Academic Support and Testing Services. Approximately 30 part-time tutors are employed in the center, and that group consists of both unionized professional-level (bachelor's or higher holding) staff and contracted paraprofessional-level (no higher education degree) staff. In addition to myself and the tutors, there is one administrative assistant who keeps us all in line (isn't that always case?). We

all work together to serve students in four campus locations as well as inside of two prisons.

Initially, as we adapted to remote education, the center started broad with online tutoring: all tutors trained on Zoom, Google Meet, Blackboard Collaborate, and GoBoard because we were unsure which students would be most comfortable with and we wanted to make sure we were able to meet them on any platform they requested. This over-training of platforms also helped staff to gain comfortability with technology in general via a safe zone of trial and error as we worked together to adapt. Near daily training sessions were led by myself and our lead tutor for the first two weeks of our remote work while I simultaneously tinkered behind the scenes, revamping our website and creating informational PDFs and JPEGs for faculty and staff. At the end of those two weeks, I shared revised plans and processes with faculty and academic staff (advising, retention, dual enrollment, TRiO programs, etc) as well as the student body. Online by-appointment tutoring took off, and we switched gears towards building remote supplemental instruction. Before the move to remote work, supplemental instruction was in-person only: tutors sat in on each class session and hosted up to 2 hours of study groups per week. To adapt, all tutors were enrolled in respective Blackboard course shells as Teaching Assistants so they could post announcements and access student email lists. Weekly “drop-in” Zoom times were established for each class, particularly helpful for students who needed assistance but were too shy to reach out and ask for it. One-on-one appointment times were created and posted

as well. Supplemental instructors also reviewed online tools, such as Padlet and Flippity, to better engage students in an online environment.

Perhaps most helpful though, was the implementation of standing weekly staff meetings via Zoom. This was such a simple step, but as anyone in a tutoring environment knows, it's near impossible under "normal" circumstances. Our tutors have varied shift schedules, balanced with their coursework and personal commitments, and dedicating weekly time to gather as a group is not often possible. Once monthly training sessions and gatherings at the beginning and end of each semester are easy- but getting together for one hour (the same hour weekly, especially!) is not possible. For the first few weeks, I shared info and updates from other areas of the colleges, as well as an ever-changing list of ideas and plans for our community. Over time though, these weekly staff meetings became a place to just gather with friends, to check-in on each other, and to build a stronger community. Without it ever being explicitly encouraged or approved, staff invited their children, spouses, and pets to say "hi" during our meetings. We shared struggles and successes with working from home, working while teaching children, and working while sharing spaces not designed for work at all. Checking in on each other, seeing that our new normal was not all that abnormal from our colleagues, and dedicating time to share and vent, became a comforting necessity as the weeks turned into months, turned into semesters.

Ultimately, and so simply, the move to remote provided our academic support center the opportunity to more deeply connect as we strengthened our ability to wholly support the students we serve. The move to Zoom tutoring was stressful but doable, the move to Blackboard-hosted supplemental instruction was clunky but possible, but it was the opportunity to gather that was the most impactful. Now, as we look towards the third semester of remote work (fall), we've established a place where staff can openly and comfortably workshop ideas: Should we build a shared list of best practices to add to our handbook? Can we expand into evening and weekend hours? Are we able to work more closely with department chairs to build new partnerships? I say, yes to all! As long as we continue to try new things, and reflect on how they play out in practice, we can continue to group-lead lasting change within our center.

About the Author



Stephanie Marchetti has been employed in public higher education for over a decade, currently serving as the Director of Academic Support and Testing Services at Mount Wachusett Community College in Massachusetts. She holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in Communication and is halfway through a doctorate in higher education leadership. Stephanie focuses her work on academic support, policy, and inclusion and strives to lead teams that are empowered by innovative and creative thinking.

COVID-19, Cohorts, and Community

By Alexandra D. Schmied, M.S.

Independent Scholar

By the time I heard the news that COVID-19 would shut down my university, I was over it. At first, I gasped - we were one of the first schools in the nation to make this call, and I was surprised at how quickly things were moving. But then, I apathetically shrugged my shoulders (after all, I am renowned for saying “do what you got to do”). A closed school meant that I would not have to travel back and forth for two hours of my day; I would save gas, take care of myself, and work more at my part-time job. I would not have to stay on campus for 12 straight hours, pack three meals in the morning, and I most certainly would not have to spend time with my cohort.

If you are reading this and you were in my cohort, do not take this the wrong way. I had a blast getting through graduate school with you! But when COVID-19 came around, that is what we were doing - *getting through*. We got back from a national conference - eating, sleeping, and breathing higher education. We were finishing our program and working on theses and final defenses. On top of that, we all frantically started the job search during hiring freezes. We pitted ourselves against one another instead of supporting each other through the process. I was not over you as individuals; I was over our grouping, the graduating class, the class that would make history, Zoom University Class of 2020! You get it.

The first week was odd but doable. I sat down with my graduate assistantship supervisors to devise a plan that would continue to give me meaningful work. At the time, I was with an office that quickly transferred to virtual outreach and services. But then I logged into class, and my peers were stuck figuring out how to have face to face interactions over a computer screen. We would spend the first half-hour of our Zoom classes checking in with one another. I would quickly share my thoughts and turn my camera off. While empathetic, I am also one to put my head down and get the work done; I wanted to distance myself from the emotions and “do what I had to do” to finish the program. The next half hour of the class would be a modified version of an already prepared PowerPoint presentation. Our professors would quickly go through them and encourage us to use the chat function and reactions. I had flashbacks to the undergraduate online classes that I had tried, failed, and dropped, and I immediately fell behind. My first-generation self had imposter syndrome again. Suddenly, I missed the classroom.

I thrive at school; it has always been my happy place. But my heart ached that I could not hug my classmates. That discourse with my professors went from discussion to chat boxes. That I would not have the excitement of walking into work or class the day after spring break. That I would not have those silly five-minute breaks where my friends and I rushed to the bottom floor of the building to get snacks from the vending machine. And the heavy hitter, I would not walk across the stage to get my master’s degree. I was lonely, uninterested, and scared. And so, to avoid yet again, I tried to

distract myself with my thesis. But then it hit me - I created a plan for a pilot Living Learning Community for students in recovery from substance abuse. I was still yearning (and researching) for the community! It was quite melancholy to write about the need for community in such a time. I hurt all over again. I was writing about community and togetherness in a time where I needed it most.

The word “cohort” means “a group of people banded together or treated as a group” (Oxford University Press, 2020a). The first few times I read this definition, I thought it described how I felt perfectly. My program forced me to band with many people I did not even know two years ago; brought together because we were graduating at the same time. That is what I was over - the grouping of us.

While I was searching for graduate programs, people always sold the cohort model to me. I was deciding between two schools - one cohort program and one non-cohort program. Just about everyone said to go to the cohort school. Yes, there were other reasons to pick that program over the other one, but everyone mentioned the cohort. I politely declined, explaining I was there to get my degree and start my professional career, I made friends wherever I went, and a cohort was not do-or-die for me. In hindsight, I am glad I picked the cohort program. I love knowing I could go to anyone in my year, and they would understand what I was going through, I found my friends, and now have an automatic professional network. I liked my Good Company and my community of scholars.

The word “community” means “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals” (Oxford University Press, 2020b). That is what I missed - not my cohort, but *the sense of community* that was among us. COVID-19 forced us to shelter away in our places of living. No longer did our lives and connecting points revolve around campus, they revolved around logging into a meeting simultaneously. When I realized this, I kept my screen on, texted my friends during class, reached out, and checked in on folks, I had Netflix Parties over documentaries, and I felt myself becoming recharged and ending the program on a positive note.

I look back at the definition of the word cohort, and the word banded. I see it in a different light now - we were banded in a group indeed, but we banded and joined forces to make sure we felt supported through the end. My cohort turned into a community that I was able to lean on during this time. Sure, the community could still endure pain - but that is what makes the connection so human. They reminded me that I was not alone, motivated me to keep going, and were always quick to answer calls, texts, and Zoom invites.

I learned a lot about myself, what I took for granted, and what I value in life by studying and finishing grad school during COVID-19. I do not wish those months of feeling lost on anyone, but I want everyone to find their community. Whoever it is, make sure you have people in your corner. Find your Good Company.

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About the Author



Alex Schmied is a recent graduate of West Chester University's Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs program. She holds a bachelor's in Public Health from Temple University. Merging her two passions, she loves finding ways to support holistic student development and the community around them.

Communication is the Key: Navigating the Transition from In-Person to Virtual Academic Support Services

By **P. Brandon Johnson, Ph.D.**

Julie Murphy, Ed.D.

University of Texas at Dallas

Introduction

For two weeks, facilitated by an extended spring break, the Student Success Center (SSC) at the University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) transitioned its in-person services, professional staff, and nearly 200 student workers to virtual services and remote work in response to Covid-19. Strong communication and meeting structure were essential to making this transition possible. This paper examines how the SSC team leveraged the existing communication structure to inform staff, draft and execute plans, and provide updates. We present this through the lens of the associate dean of the Office of Undergraduate Education and the director of the Student Success Center.

About the Student Success Center and the University of Texas at Dallas

The Student Success Center is a student's portal to achieving academic success at UT Dallas. Whether students are seeking review sessions, tutoring, or other approaches for academic support, the SSC team, consisting of professional staff and student peer leaders, make every effort to assist

students in meeting their academic goals across a wide variety of subject areas. Located in the Eugene McDermott Library, the SSC is an Academic Affairs unit in the Office of Undergraduate Education.

Services offered by the SSC include: peer academic coaching, drop-in, and appointment peer tutoring, Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL), Supplemental Instruction (SI), the Writing Center, Communications Lab, and the Institute for Peer Education (IPE). In all, the SSC employs 18 professional staff (full-time, part-time, and temporary) and over 200 student workers. The Director of the Student Success Center, Dr. Julie Murphy, reports to the Associate Dean in the Office of Undergraduate Education, Dr. P. Brandon Johnson. The SSC is a part of his programming umbrella. UT Dallas is a four-year “R1” doctoral-granting university of the highest research activity, as classified by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. Located in Richardson, Texas, UT Dallas enrolls 29,500 undergraduate and graduate students.

Preparing for the Unknown – Strong Communication Channels

Dr. Johnson, Associate Dean

I was keeping a watchful eye on news about Covid-19 in early February. Each new story prompted more speculation about what could happen at UT Dallas. Then, more colleges and universities announced canceled classes, extended spring breaks, and virtual classes for the remainder of the semester. My thoughts turned to what the Student Success Center

would look like with all its services being virtual, though no official announcement had been made.

As an associate dean, the Student Success Center is under my programming umbrella. But I also serve as a bridge between them and the dean of the Office of Undergraduate Education. I have weekly meetings with the dean where I receive the latest updates from the provost and president. Those meetings allow me to share the most up-to-date information to the SSC director so she can make informed decisions. These updates happen in our bi-weekly standing meetings or, if time-sensitive, through Microsoft Teams chat. I also can attend the regular SSC staff meetings as needed. This access proved invaluable as any new information could be shared directly with the team and I could answer any questions they might have in real-time.

The utility of an established communication and meeting structure was not fully realized until the pandemic. Never did I value it more than during the swift transition required by Covid-19. Because this structure was in place, I was able to receive preliminary updates from the dean and pass the information along to Dr. Murphy. That information enabled the SSC staff to be proactive by preparing for multiple scenarios, ready to implement whichever was decided. Compared to other departments, the SSC was well ahead of the curve in their Covid-19 response planning.

Dr. Julie Murphy, Student Success Center Director

To be perfectly transparent, I was not nearly as concerned about the threat of what Covid-19 may do to the functionality

of our overall institution and individually to our center in the early parts of March. I had gotten back from the First-Year Experience Conference in late February. There were only brief whisperings of what was beginning to be Covid-19's legacy in big hubs of international travel like New York City and Chicago. When two of my staff members were prepping to head to the Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference in San Antonio, my staff and I realized that this may expand into our Texas bubble sooner rather than later. The two staff members attended the conference which became only a skeleton of what they had attended in the past year. Presenters were few and far between, the expo of newly published books was non-existent, and the news of four cases in San Antonio had most travelers staying inside the hotel. This was such a good example of how quickly this virus could impact and ultimately paralyze a program/event. It was a wakeup call that I needed to make sure my staff was ready for anything.

I have a leadership team of three of my professional staff that I call my "meeting of the minds" (MOTM) group. These three professional staff have 1-4 staff members that report directly to them. We meet every two weeks to discuss higher-level issues in the Student Success Center. On the alternate weeks, the entire professional staff meets in our "ProTeam" meeting. This structure has been in place for almost a year since I became the sole director of our center. While I felt very confident in our leadership structure and the way information was relayed through these regularly scheduled meetings, I could not have foreseen how having the strong organizational

staff structure and set meeting structure would be what allowed our center to brainstorm ideas quickly when Covid-19 entered Texas faster than I ever imagined.

Forming a Plan – Leadership through Communication

Dr. Johnson, Associate Dean

Having an existing communications structure truly aided in the rapid creation of a Covid-19 response plan for the Student Success Center. Information was not siloed and there were no delays in its sharing.

The situation on campus began to change rapidly. On March 2nd, UT Dallas created a Covid-19 information page but had not announced any updates regarding spring break or virtual services. Despite this, based on information from my meetings with the dean, I asked for the SSC to begin drafting a needs assessment and preliminary action plans for virtual services. In less than a week, there was a plan in my inbox, a direct result of the SSC's functional communication channels. This was enhanced by using Microsoft Teams for communication outside of formal meetings. On March 12th, UT Dallas officially announced that spring break was extended, classes from March 23-27 were canceled, and classes would resume March 30th in a virtual format.

Preliminary plans then became official plans with two weeks to implement them. We became even more reliant on our communication and meeting structure when the university notified us that beginning March 16th all “non-essential” staff were to work remotely. Not only did we have

to plan for a virtual second half of the semester, but we would be doing it from our homes as well.

Communication is key during times of extreme stress and upheaval. Having our regularly scheduled touchpoints allowed me to share a consistent message of support and confidence in their plan to help students. It gave me several opportunities to assuage fears, address concerns, or to simply say, "I don't know" and "thank you for all you are doing".

There were also several opportunities to provide context on why certain decisions and actions were being taken. Often, we are far removed from the reason university-wide decisions are made. An email shows up in your inbox and a new policy or procedure is enacted with little explanation. It was important to me to share the "why" behind the many actions the university was taking, as context helps build understanding, though not acceptance. I did not expect them to agree with everything. However, I hoped that sharing this contextual information would enable them to process the rapid changes better.

Dr. Julie Murphy, Student Success Center Director

I remember meeting with Dr. Johnson for our regular biweekly one-on-one in early March and him asking me to meet with my staff to brainstorm some alternate formats for our programs should the decision to close down the university in the coming weeks be made. Having never seen an institution for higher education closed down for any long-term reason, I was surprised that a full shutdown was on the table. Luckily, our university has its leaders work on

continuity plans for their areas annually. We plan for floods, tornados, and other natural disasters. Mostly we think about our university infrastructure being damaged and in what ways that would impact us working in our regular spaces. For the first time, I felt a true thankfulness for this exercise that I may have described as busywork once upon a time.

When I met with my leadership team, I decided to take the continuity plan approach as well mainly to not cause alarm. I had a variety of perspectives on my leadership team, one skeptical that Covid-19 would ever be an issue, another obsessively watching Twitter for updates, and the last somewhere in the middle. I told them honestly that I did not know what to think. While it may seem far-fetched that we would all be sent home, we needed to be ready to keep our services running regardless. I asked them to meet with their direct reports immediately and get some feasible ideas on the table. If the virus got worse and the university sent us all home, how would we continue to help students in our many different areas, how long could we sustain helping in an alternative format, what equipment would they need, how would we communicate all these changes out to our students and other stakeholders on campus?

The next day I had thoughtful and detailed plans on how we could continue to support our students in hand. They walked me through their ideas, and we were immediately able to pitch our best ones to Dr. Johnson. Our mission was obvious – keep our 200 plus peer leaders employed and find

formats that allow the Student Success Center to continue to be a place that students know they can find help.

Our plan was unique to each program, as we knew immediately our models could not all look the same virtually. Staff were able to solidify details in the next couple of days and by Friday of that week, we were notified that the campus was closing. It would turn out that neither staff nor students would return to campus for the rest of the spring or summer semesters. Never in my life have I had a better example of the phrase “well, that escalated quickly”.

Leading through Challenges

Dr. Johnson, Associate Dean

My family and I moved from one town to another the weekend before the shelter-in-place orders went into effect in Texas, and I was completely unprepared to work from home. My laptop was the only technology I had brought home with me because we were moving. I did not think there was the slightest chance I would not be coming back to work the next week. Most of the emails I sent were from my phone because the internet had not been set up. I quickly realized how much I needed my two monitors, a mouse, books, and my essential oil diffuser. We were permitted to briefly visit the campus after a while. Gradually, I brought more office items. Unfortunately, that was the least of my challenges.

It was becoming apparent that pandemic would have a significant financial impact on the operations of UT Dallas. A hiring freeze, suspension of raises, promotions, and non-essential spending were soon announced. All the cost

containment measures directly affected the Student Success Center. Plans to fill a position vacated by a retired staff member were put on hold, leaving one person to pick up the extra work. Approved and scheduled promotions were paused, and any purchases had to be approved by the dean.

Citing additional financial reasons, UT Dallas discontinued all temporary employees for the foreseeable future. The announcement affected six of the SSC team members. I subsequently notified them that May 15th would be their last day. Additionally, the SSC's budget for the next fiscal year would have to be reduced by 10 percent.

To say the SSC team had been on a metaphorical rollercoaster is an understatement. The transition to remote work was abrupt and everyone faced different challenges working from home. Flexibility and understanding from my dean were essential if I was going to be successful. If I needed flexibility and understanding of my situation, then I had to be prepared to give that and more to others. This was a time to be sensitive to the needs of people and not force unnecessary restraints. For some, the traditional 8 am-5 pm workday was gone, and we all had to be OK with that.

Having opportunities to address the SSC team during several of the "ProTeam" meetings was invaluable. These regularly scheduled meetings allowed me to share and clarify information that was disseminated by the University President and to address rumors. For a while, it felt like one bad news update after another. Yet, in the face of adversity and uncertainty, the SSC team was always professional. They

never stopped working hard because they are dedicated to helping students. An added benefit of being in those meetings is transparency. What I knew, they knew. And if I did not yet know, I could find out and report back at the next meeting.

Dr. Julie Murphy, Student Success Center Director

Our team transitioned to working from home mainly on laptops (some institutional and some personal) as the instruction to leave campus came quickly and it was hard to imagine that staff at least would not be invited back at some point in the next few weeks. We grabbed some file folders, a notepad or two, and maybe our favorite pens while heading out the door.

The professional staff handled the transition with such grace despite the many transitions that were taking place simultaneously. Some were dealing with having school-aged children at home and suddenly becoming their teachers. Some had little ones underfoot who no longer had daycare to attend. Some lived alone and went weeks without seeing a friendly face. Most had no dedicated home office space or reliable wireless connections. Many had anxiety about their job security. Despite it all, they worked hard. They were available and open-minded to all the changes. They ironed out the last technology needs of their programs moving virtually, in addition to planning ways to train their student staff to work in this new environment. They wrote drafts of emails about the changes to schedules to faculty liaisons and other program stakeholders on campus, got data to our webmaster to update

all program pages online, answered emails, and attended our first of many meetings via TEAMS.

Meanwhile, our student leaders were all finishing their first week of what became two weeks of spring break as everything was changing in warp speed, so the professional staff used a mix of text messages, emails and phone calls to get all leaders aware of what changes were happening with their program and the invitation to keep working for us remotely. They were intentional about letting them decide simply because they would be asked to tutor in a modality they did not originally agree to or trained in. More importantly, as students, they might not feel comfortable with the added stress of taking classes online and tutoring online. In a show of dedication, 180 of our nearly 200 workers agreed to continue offering virtual services after spring break. All were trained, set up in the online platform used by their respective program, and were ready to serve students when they returned on March 30th.

Overall, the transition for our professional and student staff has been pretty seamless. I think the biggest challenge is missing the organic staff connections in person and the everyday interactions with our peer leaders and the students we serve. Mimicking these situations virtually has been an obstacle, but having our standing meetings allowed for regular touchpoints that did not feel forced. We also added in some social events such a Friday Trivia and a virtual staff retreat that allowed the staff relationships to be sustained and continue to grow.

From a program assessment standpoint, our program coordinators were very intentional about asking both peer leaders and students who came to our center virtually about their experiences so that we could learn what worked best and most effective for their programs. These lessons helped streamline services for summer and most importantly helped give Dr. Johnson the data he needed to make the very challenging decision of keeping the SSC programs virtual-only for the fall semester. Every day provides more data, more lessons, and ultimately the opportunity for us to work towards our center's mission of being a student's primary portal to achieving academic success at UT Dallas.

Conclusion

Neither of us could have imagined the overwhelming impact a strong communication and meeting structure would have on our ability to respond to the challenges Covid-19 presented. Our structure allowed everyone to share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns, accelerating the time it took to make critical decisions. Socially, our meetings helped the team to maintain a sense of community and normalcy in an uncertain time, being simultaneously productive and therapeutic. On the surface, meetings seem like such an insignificant and sometimes inefficient component, yet they are an integral part of the success the SSC was able to achieve during this unprecedented and difficult time. Communication truly is one of the keys to success.

About the Authors



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Dr. Julie Murphy has spent over fifteen years helping college students thrive in the higher education setting. She currently serves as a director of the Student Success Center at University of Texas at Dallas employing professional staff and 200 student leaders to academically support students with coursework outside the classroom. She earned her Doctorate in Education from Texas Tech University.

COVID-19 Chronicles: Listening, Listservs, and Leadership during a Pandemic

By Danielle L. Archambault

Christine M. McDermott

Wesley College

As higher education professionals, we know the value of education and student engagement. Covid-19 has changed the way we engage and interact with students and colleagues. As we try to prepare for students safe return campuses this fall, we cannot help but be reminded that the Flu Pandemic of 1918 had three waves (CDC, 2020), potentially foreshadowing COVID-19's "here to stay" attitude.

Wesley College's spring break was earlier than most other institutions, which eliminated the buffer week. For example, some schools extended their spring break by a week to give faculty time to transition their courses to an online format. Without that small luxury, Wesley was in a unique position: how do we get classes and support services online in only a couple of days? As a primarily residential campus, Wesley students are used to accessing services by walking a short distance to the Robert H. Parker Library (PL) or the College Center (CC) and getting personalized one on one services. The PL houses many services and programs, such as information technology, library resources, career advising, first-year programs, tutoring, academic coaching, etc. The CC houses high traffic offices, such as the Registrar, the Business Office,

Financial Aid, and Student Affairs. Each office, service, and program had to work together to transition services, forms, and programs online.

In addition to the traditional challenges of online services and classes, Wesley (a minority-serving institution) has a large population of first-generation college students who are financially and academically underprepared for college. Without access to the internet or textbooks, our students experience challenges, such as conflict at home, communication roadblock with faculty and staff, as well as being physically distant from academic supports (tutoring/academic coaching).

As the cultural force on campus, Student Success & Retention (SSR), provided leadership and advocacy to students, faculty, and staff and efficiently connected the campus community with resources and supports to ground them during this time of transition.

The first step, listening, required gathering feedback in the form of qualitative survey data. SSR launched student and faculty impact surveys about a variety of challenges, including feelings of engagement, technology barriers, etc. These results were brought to the College's CAG (COVID Action Group) for immediate absorption and review. These results informed what would become CAG's to-do list and ensure students' and faculty's needs were being met.

The second step, listservs, involved SSR staff members connecting with colleagues across the country via listservs. There were webinars, YouTube videos, Zoom meetings, and virtual coffee and concerns that formed a patchwork of shared

values, venting, and troubleshooting. This allowed for many things, but one of the most important was the incorporation of GoBoard into SSR's tutoring platform. Now, tutors can use GoBoard (a free platform) to have video conferencing with tutees and use the resources, whiteboard with STEM features, and have copies of their boards emailed for studying/future use. The use of GoBoard is just the beginning of the transition and supporting online tutoring and mentoring at the College.

Overall, leadership was a key factor in ongoing improvements for Wesley and our preparations for bringing students back to campus in the era of COVID-19. To date, CAG meets regularly to finalize plans, listservs are still consulted, and innovations are being discovered to enhance our online services. Although much uncertainty lies ahead, we know that SSR will continue our dedication and innovation in our support of the Wesley community as COVID-19 continues.

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About the Authors



Danielle L. Archambault has been serving the Wesley community since 2015. She is currently the Associate Director of Student Success & Retention (SSR). SSR supports students' personal, academic, and professional successes. She enjoys reading, family time, and hanging out with her cat, Jeffery Beau.



Christine M. Mcdermott, an alum, has worked at Wesley College for 20 years, starting in the Student Affairs department and finally transitioning to Academic Affairs. Currently, she is the Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Director of SSR. She enjoys running, spending time with her family, and reading.

Create Plan, Change Plan, Adjust Plan, Repeat.

By Kaitlyn Crouse-Machcinski
West Chester University

I remember when news of the coronavirus broke and the mixed feelings that spread to the United States and if the country would lockdown. There was a mix of people stocking up and preparing, and an equal number of people stating it was all an overreaction. These reactions were similar when our University decided early to remain remote after Spring Break. Our staff was lucky. We were given 3-weeks to plan for our switch from in-person instruction to distant learning. Our students were on spring break when the change was announced, and all faculty and staff were given two weeks after the announcement to transition classes and services online. We made our plans and adjusted when necessary. An example of adjusting was our collective Zoom ID file that we used for students to access their tutors. Right as this was working great, the University added passwords onto everyone's Zoom account to avoid unwelcome visitors. We had to adjust! Overall that semester and the transition went smoothly. We had plenty of time to plan for a virtual summer and assumed we would be back to normal in the fall.

Along with many people in the country, we assumed wrong. We created plans for the fall; we bought equipment, we created new policies, we staffed our learning center as usual, and then the University decided we would be in-person during the fall. However, our space was not equipped for social distancing. Therefore, we came up with new ideas to

live-stream sessions from our center, so tutors would have full access to our center's resources, but our space has no windows. After careful consideration, we thought even with no students, there would be too many tutors in the area to safely social distance and avoid spreading COVID-19. We adjusted our plans to have complete virtual tutoring with equipment sign-outs, such as Bluetooth headphones, laptops, small whiteboards, and iPads, to make virtual tutoring easier. We thought we were done planning.

Then the University changed its plans to all virtual classes and limited students on campus. We had to adjust our plans again. We learned through trial and error in the summer that one-on-one sessions or very small groups worked best for virtual tutoring. We also found that students preferred as-needed sessions versus the weekly model we use in the regular semester. We changed our plans one last time to reflect small group and one-on-one sessions, put all registration online, and adjusted our hours and budget to reflect this new model. Now starts the real work and planning out all the details that go along with a virtual semester, including scheduling, training, and orientation for the tutors.

I consider myself very lucky to be a part of such a strong team. I do not doubt that the plans will need to be adjusted as we move into this semester and figure out what is working best for students and what needs to be fixed. We are all adapting to this new normal, and as we do, we have our students in the front of our minds since this is their new normal as well. I am very excited to see how my University rises to the occasion of a full-virtual semester. I am even more

excited to return to campus when it's safe and see all the students and especially my tutors.

About the Author



Kaitlyn Crouse-Machcinski works as the Assistant Director of the Learning Assistance and Resource Center at West Chester University (WCU). She is also a doctoral student in WCU's EdD in Policy, Planning, and Administration program. Her research interests include online student engagement and participation. She currently holds level two learning center leadership certification through the NCLCA.

Navigating Higher Education in a Pandemic: Find Your People, Infuse Work with Joy, and Wear a Mask

By Dana M. Malone, Ph.D.

Tara K. Ising, Ph.D.

James D. Breslin Ph.D.

Bellarmino University

Unprecedented. Historic. Evolving. The rhetoric we've experienced living through a global pandemic is almost as frightening and disturbing as the pandemic itself. We can easily imagine historians of all fields looking back on this time in 2020 as widespread, collective trauma. Using that lens, our experiences, emotions, reactions, and needs take on new meaning. Trauma impacts people differently, but in many cases serves to foster isolation, even when the trauma is a shared experience.

Our individual experiences with the collective trauma of COVID-19, and the added impacts of inept public response in the United States, have spanned a range of emotional and intellectual reactions. There have been fears, confusion, and yes, tears. Still, we've also found community, camaraderie, laughter, and joy. We are all college student educators and, though we live in different states and work in disparate roles, we found a way to join forces amidst the pandemic and to foster belonging and shared purpose by focusing on what we love to do: creating opportunities for student learning and development.

This short paper is intended to serve as a thought exercise on how we navigate these experiences, an artifact of this unusual time, and a reminder that few things are as fulfilling as finding your people. This discussion is grounded and made tangible in the process we created to design and deploy a new course in less than 60 days. Our collective intent here is less a focus on the course itself and more a meditation on how the process laid bare the intersection of our intellectual, professional, and emotional lives in this time. As a result, we have intentionally indicated individual section authors and allowed all our voices to be present together, rather than forcing us into a singular authorial approach. We hope the ability to hear and compare our various takes on our story will be an added layer of value.

Collaborative, Collegial Curricular Design

As the spring semester quickly transitioned online, our office (Institutional Effectiveness) conducted student and faculty needs assessments. The majority of the data concerning teaching and learning revealed that faculty and students were doing their best to pivot to a new format while supporting each other. Bellarmine's culture is grounded in faculty-student engagement, so their collaborative position was not unprecedented. The unique data that our analysis revealed were novel confounding variables contributing to academic performance: remote learning for a traditional brick and mortar liberal arts university and the physical and psychological tolls of the rapid onset of a new normal. With some adjustments and enhancements, our existing resources

could be leveraged to triage challenges for current students. Besides, we considered new approaches to student support. Bellarmine recognizes that physical and mental well-being not only contribute to academic success but centers its mission and values in educating the whole person, promoting collaboration, creativity, and compassion to cultivate grounded, ethical, and civically engaged students. This institutional aim demands more than a singular interpretation of student performance or success.

Our discussions led us to consider incoming students, as well. Like our students, their schools had closed abruptly and shifted instruction online. We were not aware of any standardized approach to non-traditional instruction for high school students. Anecdotally, we had heard stories of frustrated teachers, parents, and students concerning teaching and learning. The one certainty was uncertainty. Students making the transition from high school to college might not necessarily be unprepared compared to previous incoming first-years, but their preparation differed. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic suggested they may not have first-year experiences resembling anything they envisioned.

Developing the Concept (Tara)

As an organization, our university (and I, as a human being) was overwhelmingly focused on reacting to daily, unfamiliar challenges. As educators, advocates for social responsibility, and stewards of continuous improvement, our team craved an opportunity to be proactive and provide some structure to incoming students. Each of us (the authors) has

reactively intervened with academically struggling undergraduate students in several capacities, including teaching courses that lead to success by providing much more than study skills or institutional orientation. We have researched and refined approaches to student success and are acutely aware of the myriad variables that contribute to academic performance. Given the circumstances, I believed the best approach to promote academic success in the Louisville Metro area was to develop a proactive, online, credit-bearing course tailored to all rising college first-years, not simply Bellarmine's incoming class of 2024. Bellarmine is a private institution. The key to this initiative was to ensure the course was accessible and affordable. We couldn't do it for free (trust me, we tried), but we were able to offer it at the same price as the state's community college system's courses- and incentivize it in several ways. Drawing on our previous experiences, I realized we had a solution that could rapidly be tailored to the emerging situation.

Conceptually, we took three major perspectives. First, we acknowledged the connections between trauma (the pandemic) and learning impairment. Any intervention for recent high school graduates should include strategies of a trauma-informed practice. Second, we understood the value of problem-based learning and self-efficacy skills, with their links to college persistence and positive learning outcomes in online learning environments. Finally, we were familiar with a curriculum centered on cognitive development and higher education in a socio-cultural context to enhance academic performance and retention. The process of creating and

implementing this concept led to a considerable amount of contemplation, effort, and joy in an otherwise melancholy period.

Shaping the Process (Jim)

When Tara came to me with the concept for this course, and an opportunity to try to do something that would allow us to support students now, amid chaos and trauma, I was smitten. We also immediately recognized that this concept was timely, relevant, and could be a strategic and public relations advantage for our institution. Since I serve as an administrator, I assessed my role in this process: find ways to say yes, bring good people together, and secure resources to support the work (providing time and expertise for free simply because we enjoy the work should never be a thing, and I find that particularly true amid such uncertainty). As I began coordinating an effort, I felt the emotional, psychological, and physical benefits of throwing myself into something I believed in and cared about. It felt like good work and I relished it.

I was able to provide the financial resources and the support of relevant executive leaders in a few days and proceeded to assemble a team. There was only one choice for who would lead the curriculum development team and I was thrilled to approach Dana. Meanwhile, Tara was getting other relevant folks on campus engaged, everyone from the faculty who would need to approve the curriculum to the marketing team who could help us promote a new summer course to incoming college students. Our conversations were brisk,

focused, and purposeful. They were also a refuge, a calm harbor that even though it didn't shield us from the raging storm of life around us, at least allowed us some perspective and an opportunity to focus on how we might contribute to collective processing and healing for and with students. Like any process in higher education, it wasn't perfect. Unlike most processes in our field, it did come together quickly, effectively, and resulted in a truly wonderful opportunity for students. In the process, I also realized that the satisfaction (almost a high, really) that comes from the opportunity to shape or contribute to their learning and development, removed though I am in my administrative role, infuses so much joy and purpose in my work and life.

Constructing the Course (Dana)

When Jim approached me in early April with the idea to reimagine and re-invent a previously successful course model we worked with at another institution, I was immediately in. I loved the model and content and knew it was an effective approach to student success and was excited to think about how it could be adapted for incoming students amid a traumatic transition from high school to college during a pandemic-induced quarantine. I was also thrilled to be able to partner with him and Tara on this project; it felt serendipitous that we had come together for this task at this moment.

I led the curriculum design team, which consisted of a mix of players with varying levels of familiarity with the model and content, the students we were targeting, and where this course fits in the larger student success landscape at our

institution and the broader community. We met initially to discuss the overall course concept, the main objectives, and focal points of the curriculum, and then I began to design and build it. Knowing I had their full support (and that of the larger course development team) helped me be creative and work efficiently, unencumbered by internal or external interferences. Time was of the essence, and there was much to consider and do in a matter of six weeks. I set to work to build in support elements in the course structure and curriculum. I considered and specifically scaffolded such areas as online learning capabilities, self-directed learning strategies, and academic skills necessary for success in the college classroom. Additionally, I infused trauma-informed pedagogy elements into the design at all levels. This meant, among other things, flexibility and options where appropriate and feasible. Finally, while this course was not specifically about the pandemic itself, processing the impact of COVID-19, and what it meant for students' experiences of schooling, learning, college preparedness, and sense of well-being at that moment and moving forward, was a significant element of the course and imbued throughout.

Finding Joy in the Work and Each Other

We Are More than Our Work (Tara)

Every semester it seems there are times that we must focus strictly on the transactional. That is, the business of higher education steals our time and we briefly neglect our passions. Passion for discovery and creativity are what drive us to

pursue the life of the mind. A terminal degree is a misnomer. There is nothing terminal about the Ph.D.'s trajectory. We continuously generate new questions and knowledge. We thrive on opportunities to think through complex issues with our colleagues. Those discussions inspire our research, teaching, and renew our devotion to the field. The emergence of COVID-19 has amplified the transactional and multiplied the amount of troubleshooting we do. At the end of the day (much later than usual) we are exhausted and exasperated. For all the things we have accomplished since early March, it feels as though we are treading water.

Conceptualizing, developing, and implementing this course added more time to my overcrowded schedule. At the same time, the resultant exhaustion yielded exhilaration rather than exasperation. I was able to engage in the conversations I need to feed my academic soul. This work had direction and purpose that could quiet the crushing noise of the environment. We were excited by each other's ideas. We were able to laugh about our mistakes, reminisce of different days, and feel as if we were doing something substantive. We believed in the work and believed in each other. It helps to know the right people. Our team was a mix of strengths, while one was universal: a sense of humor. We all take our work, but not ourselves, very seriously. That may be the greatest takeaway of this project. Find people whose work you can admire, but if you would rather not sit next to them on an intercontinental flight, reconsider the workgroup.

Trust and Inspiration amid the Uncertainty and Weariness (Dana)

I was willing to take on this additional workload even during the upheaval of the early days of the pandemic when each day brought new guidelines and challenges – the likes of which not seen before in our lifetime, when my kitchen table suddenly became my children's classroom and my office, and when I was already running day and night to fulfill my personal and professional responsibilities.

I wanted to do this because I believed in the idea and the heart of what we were doing, but more importantly, I could do it because I did not have to perform for these people. I didn't have to expend my already limited time and energy on proving myself or earning their esteem. We were way past that. There was no time in this rapid course development for back and forth sessions where egos get in the way. No, we were esteemed colleagues, a team. Dare I say...we were friends. There was implicit trust in, and respect for, me and my work, and that was mutual. I believed in them and the work they did. What's more, they had my back and I had theirs, which was a necessity as we were navigating uncharted waters regarding living and working during a pandemic as well as what we were doing with the course specifically.

We were venturing into new terrain with this idea – it was based on a successful course model we'd offered/taught at another institution when we worked together previously, but that was over ten years ago. This time we were designing an

adaptation for a different student demographic – namely, new, incoming students transitioning from high school to college during COVID-19 (with all the potential pandemic-related transition traumas), who had not set foot on campus and had no experiential schematic context for college courses or the information we were presenting. This kind of outside-the-box approach and rapid deployment could not have been accomplished in the timeframe and manner we did without the trust, the respect, and the kinship we shared in the space between us. Those qualities formed the foundation for our work on this endeavor and made the process of doing it not just enjoyable but truly fun -- student-focused, scholarly-minded, higher education professionals, geeking out on a project, and kind of fun! Connecting with my people, unleashing our collaborative creativity, and working toward a greater good for students was uplifting and enlivening during a grave and trying period. For me, it was a temporary sanctuary in the throes of a relentless storm.

Centering People and Connection (Jim)

There's something about the combination of being in the zone with other people, your people that fosters so much connectedness and belonging. I'm an extrovert, already accustomed to plenty of video chats and meetings thanks to friends who live all over the place and some work I do with professional associations, but disconnectedness from the pandemic and the blur of the increased workload weighed heavy on me after the first several weeks of this reality. This project felt like an opportunity to dip my toes back into the

kind of work that drew me into the field initially, while also leveraging the administrative and organizational skills I've worked to develop over many years. It was also more than that. Doing this work with some of my people felt like a homecoming. It wasn't exactly a port in the storm sort of homecoming, because the pandemic and its impacts swirled around us unabated.

The concept of home to me isn't necessarily even a safe space. Home is being with your people, finding your groove in whatever you're doing, and knowing inherently that you've done the good work of real relationship-building that means you can challenge and be challenged. The sense I often experienced in this work, in being in this home with my people, was a sort of soothing. We're all people who center growth, not being static. And we're achievers. We get stuff done, solve problems, and we learn from each other and the process. The opportunity to access that, even though we haven't all worked together in years, was a profound source of joy.

Retrospectively, I marvel at the privilege we had not just to be healthy, employed, and able to do good work but to be in it together and have fun doing it. This experience has only served to reinforce that which I've long believed: we are a human profession. Our ability to connect and foster relationships with each other is an incredible strength in our field, and it's something that has helped me not just find joy but maintain a focus on connecting with my people, and finding new people, even in chaos and disaster.

Concluding Thoughts

We consider (and ask you to do the same) how this time has shown us that connecting, networking, and engaging colleagues isn't about prestige or finding the next job. It's how we find our people, infuse joy into our work and field, and hold our humanity dearly even in a time when the rhetoric around higher education would reduce us to economic engines of our locales. We teach students through our attitudes and actions at least as much as we do through our classroom instruction and tutoring. We challenge all our colleagues to allow students to see how human we are, and how our shared humanity is a source of strength and belonging.

To those who may be reading this at some point beyond the present pandemic, who may be struggling now, or who may even be facing their crises: we did indeed find joy in this time and we're rooting for you.

Of Note

Bellarmino University is a mid-sized, Catholic university located in Louisville, KY. All three of us teach graduate-level courses at Bellarmine, but not all of us live in Kentucky. Please reach out to us if you are interested in more information about the course content and structure – we'd love to share and consult with you if we can help. And if anyone is curious as to Dana's statement, yes, we are friends.

About the Authors



Dana M. Malone, Ph.D., is a dynamic scholar-practitioner with a diverse portfolio of experiences in higher education. She specializes in student success, strategic and assessment planning, program evaluation, student cultures, and the intersection of gender, sexuality, and religious identities. Currently, Dr. Malone is an Independent Scholar, based in the Philadelphia area, writing, teaching, speaking, and working with various institutions on a contract basis. She provides invited talks and lectures on her most recent book, *From Single to Serious: Relationships, Gender, and Sexuality on American Evangelical Campuses* (Rutgers University Press), and she teaches assessment and evaluation in the M.Ed. in Higher Education Leadership and Social Justice Program at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.



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Dr. Jim Breslin is a higher education scholar, practitioner, and consultant who specializes in student success, academic support and advising, assessment, institutional effectiveness, and leadership and administration. He currently serves as the Assistant Provost for Assessment, Accreditation, and Institutional Effectiveness at Bellarmine University. An active citizen of the field, he regularly publishes, presents at conferences, and serves on editorial boards for several peer-reviewed publications and in elected leadership roles in professional organizations.

Leadership Lessons from the Pandemic

By Eileen Brumitt

Northampton Community College

As we watched COVID creep closer and closer, even though our college had no plan yet to send us home, we knew we needed to be proactive. As the Learning Center director, I manage a large department of 6 full time and 125 part-time staff. I was concerned about our part-time professional tutors' livelihoods and how students would continue to receive academic support. My team, which consists of my assistant director and four subject coordinators, was worried about furloughs and layoffs. Since the college had no plan in place, we decided as a team to present a strong plan of our own to support students in an abrupt transition to online learning. The plan included not only a robust set of tutoring schedules covering seven days a week in WCOonline but also 125 individual Blackboard Collaborate rooms set up for online tutoring and a Virtual Front Desk to help students find their tutors.

The proudest moment of my career so far was the moment we were told to leave campus and to stay home for the foreseeable future, while our online tutoring pivot was fully planned and ready to be implemented. My dedicated team planned a move to online tutoring in two days and made it happen, including training, in one week. Our operation of 125 tutors was up and running online the day students were back

in online classes on March 23rd. Students found us and the support they needed and thanked the tutors for being there.

The major takeaway from this experience for me is that leadership takes guts and caring. We made our part-time professional tutors and our students the center of our plans. They needed us to care about them and their jobs, emotions, challenges, and health. It took strength to move on a plan that didn't have any institutional stamp of approval and to take a stand on keeping everyone employed and safe. As a new Learning Center director, I can't think of a more intense way to learn about leadership, but I know that these lessons will always stay with me.

About the Author



Eileen Brumitt is the first-year, first time director of the Northampton Community College Learning Center, which provides tutoring to thousands of students every year on three campuses and online. She has a master's degree in English literature from Lehigh University and a master's degree in history from Villanova University.

Year One: The Global Pandemic

By Hunter R. Chandler

Morehead State University

The notification on my phone dinged one morning during the summer of 2019: “Congratulations, we would like to extend an employment offer to you for the following position...” My excitement roared! I called my mom to deliver the good news. “Mom! I got the job.” I graduated from graduate school in May of 2019; I was 23 years old, and I geared up to bring a lot of energy to this position. In August, I started my first, full-time position at Morehead State University (MSU) as the Coordinator of Tutoring Services and Instructor. In this position, I am the coordinator of the Tutoring and Learning Center (TLC), and I teach First-Year Seminar and mathematics courses. As I began this new chapter in my life, the thought of titling this life reflection for the year would not have been “Year One: The Global Pandemic.” The stories presented in this reflection are my perspectives, my opinions, my vulnerabilities, and my hopes to paint the challenges of COVID-19 as opportunities to build a stronger nexus of academic support services and highlight the ingenuity of student staff.

The weeks before the University closing, the Tutoring and Learning Center prepared many students for their midterm exams. I walked through the Camden-Carroll Library, the location of the Center, where tutors and many students were learning, socializing, researching, and building a community

of learners. I spoke with a few tutors about their Spring Break plans, graduate school applications, summer internships, and post-graduation employment. I prepared for the second phase of the semester tutoring campaigns and graded a few papers that I most likely procrastinated on for a few days. I was even excited about Spring Break. I accumulated enough time to take off a few days to experience the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee. After a long day at work, I opened up Twitter, and I started seeing news about an odd virus. At this point, mobilizing in a new direction was not even the concern, but the week before Spring Break changed everything—plans canceled, applications forgotten, and limited employment.

The University President sent out a campus-wide email detailing the two-week closure of the campus for the weeks after Spring Break. My office filled with concerned tutors and students: “Hunter, what’s going on? Why are we closing? Am I still going to be paid? Are we still tutoring? Are classes going to continue? How am I supposed to succeed in a class going online? When do I move out? Are we still able to work on campus with you? What happens if I get the virus and can’t finish my classes? Is it okay to be scared?” I tried to field these questions the best that I could. I kept the message positive; I had to let them know that things were going to be okay. However, in my head, I had no clue. I was equally concerned. I felt like I needed to keep the student staff feeling like they were professionally and emotionally supported during this time, so I scheduled a mandatory meeting before Spring Break to discuss online tutoring and many of their concerns. March 12, 2020, was the last time I would see all 39 tutors face-to-face

in one room. On March 17, 2020, the University issued the operational and instructional plan that suspended all on-campus instruction.

Mobilizing online tutoring was an easy process for the Center because we were tasked with increasing the efficiency of our online tutoring delivery before COVID-19. However, we were not prepared for the issues that web-conferencing presented when many people were using it. Our main web tool for online tutoring had some glitches, so I worked with a team of four Tutor Specialists to come up with other methods. The four Tutor Specialists are an essential part of the TLC. Most importantly, they help me keep the Center feeling like a family. COVID-19 was a time when the family needed to sit down and work on resolving online tutoring issues. After long discussions, we formulated a plan that included alternative and safe web-conferencing platforms that would be a temporary replacement for our main web-conferencing tool. The Tutor Specialists created a policy for the Center that included informal alternative methods such as email, texting, etc. to reach more students. In the general semester, I did not believe that email and texting were a sufficient way of tutoring; however, I was proven wrong. Learning happens when you have trained your tutors to hold a high standard of academic integrity. I was, and continue to be, very proud of the tutors.

After courses went online, we saw an increase in tutoring. I suspected this, and I made sure the tutors were aware of this possibility. The first few weeks within the online environment

showed consistent tutoring numbers. This, I believe, was due to our social media pages. The Tutor Specialists continued to market tutoring across Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. We connected with the Student Government Association, and we asked if they would be willing to share our posts. They partnered with us to make sure our content was sent to a larger student population. Faculty members, department pages, and even the primary Morehead State University account were sharing our content. The tutors enjoyed this increase in tutoring because it alleviated any worry of not obtaining hours. Unfortunately, this was not always the case.

As the semester moved forward, our University released the Pass/Fail option to all students. This was the right decision, and I am happy this decision was made. However, this hurt the number of students being tutored. We continued to market. We reached out to students who had been tutored before. We spoke with academic advisors weekly. We heard the struggles of students learning online during a global pandemic, but there seemed to be a sense of lost hope within our students. Students were exhausted. Their entire lives were changed. Tutors began to seek employment in other places while still holding onto their tutoring positions. I felt defeated, disappointed, and angry. I felt defeated and disappointed because I did everything I could as the tutor's supervisor, and I could not reach more students. Some tutors rely on their paychecks, and I am the one who had to sign-off on their timecard of zero hours. I was angry because I felt like I failed, not just myself, but my staff.

Morehead State University was also working on their SACS-COC reaffirmation, and I was tasked with reporting the last few years of information for the TLC. I thought, “this is my first year...How would I know what to look for?” Luckily, my supervisor guided me through the process, and this is where the positivity shines through. As I analyzed data, a wonderful picture was painted for the TLC. I was able to connect an increase in retention rates for tutored students. I was able to show that, despite COVID-19, our numbers were still congruent to past semesters. I was able to uncover how much we have supported low income and underrepresented minority students. The satisfaction of tutoring services data showed us that students loved tutoring, and they loved being able to seek help from their peers. I passed this information onto the tutoring staff, and they felt empowered. They felt important because they were a part of something much larger than they originally thought.

A spark was ignited in the Tutor Specialists. They began game-planning for the summer and fall semester. We virtually met weekly to discuss these plans, and we shared the pros, cons, advantages, and disadvantages of each. For the fall semester, the TLC will be creating a learning resource library for students to have access to multiple online resources in specific classes. For example, a few tutors will create a section for College Algebra. In this section, there will be videos, worked out problems, study tips, and more. Students will no longer need to search hours upon hours on YouTube or Google to find the perfect video or resource because we have

either found it or even created it. Also for the fall semester, Tutor Specialists will be working closely with the Office of Retention and Academic Advising on academic action planning. After each appointment, tutors will ask if the student would like to create an academic action plan that creates a study plan, assesses note-taking skills, considers external factors on-course performance, and more. Tutor Specialists will become fitness trainers for academics. This is the ingenuity that the TLC needed during a time of uncertainty.

COVID-19 has created a seemingly parallel universe, but this is the universe that we now live in. Students struggled, tutors struggled, faculty struggled, staff struggled, and I struggled during these times, and this struggle may continue for a while. The message that I sought from this reflection was on empowering student staff and believing that challenges are certainly opportunities. As I look back on my first year as a full time, learning center employee, I am proud of the work the TLC has done, and I am happy with who I have become during this time. The tutors conquered an unprecedented time in history and higher education, and they have gained new skills and work ethics. The TLC has changed, the tutors have changed, and I have changed, but our change is good and ready for the next challenge.



About the Author

Hunter Chandler is the Coordinator of Tutoring Services and Instructor at Morehead State University in Morehead, Kentucky. Chandler supervises the Tutoring and Learning Center where he leads a team of tutors, tutor specialists, and office assistants to promote the Center's primary mission—Learn Together, Succeed Together.

Weekly Reflection Journal: A Term of Tutoring in the Age of COVID-19

By Keegan Gormally
Western Oregon University

Week 1 (3/25)

So far, I have tried to get more comfortable with uncertainty and change, along with the loss of routines such as staff coffee walks. Individual and group meetings over WebEx have worked well so far with colleagues and students. I miss meeting in person with students and tutors, but the meetings I have had have been fine. From a tutoring lens, I have provided the tutoring team revised expectations, reinforced an open line of communication (I am available even though I am not in my office physically), and encouraged them to double-check their technology to make sure WebEx is working properly. I also made sure to validate the fact that for many of them, their personal space, academic/study space, and workspace for tutoring might be the same. I encouraged them to explore other spaces and think about where they are most comfortable for each task.

Week 2 (4/3)

On a work level, I have been working to identify the “hidden time” I have in my day to check in with myself. What is my work style at home versus in the office? On a personal level, I have been going on more walks, checking in with

family, and writing a lot more (even more so than usual – this journal is a prime example). I have also been moving (slowly) to a new apartment, and finally, have a major move-out/move-in day set. This past week, a common theme for me has been setting daily goals (helps to make each day have more purpose and not feel so isolated/mundane) and finding joy/being thankful (not always easy). From a tutoring perspective, we are opening our virtual tutoring next week (no more in-person tutoring for the rest of the term), and the availability for all tutors have been set, including the automated confirmation email a student receives from our system when they make an appointment (thanking them for the appointment, how to join the appointment, the password, how to join via phone if their device is not working, etc.).

Week 3 (4/10)

This week has gone by fast and is the first week I have come to terms with working remotely for a while. Because of this, I have tried to check in with co-workers more via Zoom (we have now switched away from WebEx) for some “facetime” as opposed to Google chat and email alone. I miss my co-workers, and I oddly miss going to places where there are other people (even strangers, just seeing other humans in a public place). In terms of advising, I am now thinking of how to effectively work with students over the phone/video chat with the time we have in appointments. I feel the stress and confusion from students, as well as higher ed professionals in social media groups. We are now sending appointment summaries to students after we meet, and I am thinking of

continuing to do this even after we resume face to face advising. In terms of tutoring, I am working on fun, engaging tutor profiles (beyond the tutoring directory that just lists tutor names and their subjects) to make our website and program as a whole welcoming and more human in these remote times. Canva is great for this, and I hope to kick-off eventually featuring a “tutor of the month” or something with each tutor’s profile next academic year.

Week 4 (4/17)

The big move! Today was the first day I took time off (to move) while working from home. It is a little weird taking time off while away from the office already, but moving has kept my mind very busy (both physically moving items and keeping track of logistics like updating my address on various work items, utilities, and services). Aside from that, advising will pick up next week, and I hope tutoring will do the same, as I have noticed a marked decrease in appointments from the last term. It will be interesting to see how effectively remote communication will work as a part of that process (trying to promote tutoring, running usage reports to remind students who have canceled/no-showed their appointments that we are still here, etc.), as I am already noticing that students feel inundated with a “flood” of emails, as one student put it, or “email fatigue” as a colleague put it. We also received results from a check-in survey that was sent to students, and some of the common themes indicate that students need tutoring now more than ever (study skills, problems keeping up with

content, etc.) but are not using it (lack of motivation to seek help, for example).

Week 5 (4/24)

This week has featured a lot of professional development for me. I have done some reflection, outreach to my professional network, readings/webinars, and am now growing by gathering resources and accessing professional communities for guidance on how to promote and expand tutoring services in the age of COVID-19. Some actions that came out of this include crafting a tutoring services syllabus statement so faculty can include a blurb on tutoring for their classes and reaching out to various departments (strategic communication, housing, student engagement, and VPSA) to have social media spots for tutoring. Another idea my supervisor and I are implementing is to run reports of classes with high D/F/Withdrawal grades the past year, then target students below a 3.25 GPA in each of those classes by sending them a tutoring campaign email with a link to schedule an appointment with a peer tutor approved to help in that class. Hopefully, this helps make our service more convenient. I also ran a report of “murky middle” students (GPA between 2.0 and 2.5) and sent them a tutoring campaign email with a link to schedule a tutoring appointment with a Peer-Tutor approved to help with study skills. Moving forward, I will be getting cozy in the new apartment, and my family and I are talking about doing some virtual game nights coming up. Still trying to make the best of isolation, but it has not gotten any easier as far as missing colleagues, friends, family, and not

being able to do simple things (like eating in a restaurant or going to a performance) or plan out any larger trips/longer travel destinations.

Week 6 (5/1)

This week, I have turned my attention to student outreach (based on institutional survey responses, transfer student orientation, students referred by faculty to our office, tutoring, and my regular advising caseload of students). Students in general seem stressed but are resilient as well I have noticed. It has been refreshing for me to utilize and expand my professional networks, get on impromptu and scheduled Zoom calls with colleagues, and just check in with folks. On a personal note, my network of loved ones and I have started doing virtual “Zoom/FaceTime Olympics,” with activities and competitions to keep us occupied and (sort of) connected. Thank goodness for technology, or as my grandma would say, “Thank goodness we have mail to stay in touch.” On the tutoring side of things, we have seen mixed results with the targeted tutoring campaign emails. I have also spent time troubleshooting software with both Peer-Tutors and students, as a few connectivity issues have come about as of late regarding tutoring appointments. P.S.: mobile hotspots help some students who have shaky Wi-Fi at home (even better if your institution’s library loans them out for free).

Week 7 (5/8)

Outreach to students referred to us by faculty and responses from students, in general, have ramped up for me

this past week, which is a good thing but also makes me realize (again) how much I miss meeting with students and colleagues in person. Not that we do that for referrals all the time, but still. On a personal note, I have been researching family history/genealogy with my family as a side hobby we can all do together, in addition to planning out the next “Zoom Olympics” for my family next week (these are both activities I have sort of “fallen into.” On the one hand, they keep my mind busy and keep me connected to relatives. On the other, I never would have imagined doing them as the main source of interaction with loved ones). I have noticed that I have been making a concerted effort to encourage, reassure, and check-in with myself, and be encouraging to others as well. Looking to next week, I look forward to touching base with advisees, doing tutoring projects, and transfer student orientation. On the tutoring side of things specifically, I created our spring term Qualtrics assessment survey, to be sent out at the end of the term to all students who received tutoring during this term. For consistency and to measure how we are doing with student learning outcomes over time, my survey has been the same throughout the year, is kept short so more students complete it, and asks the following questions:

1. Which type of tutoring did you attend (course-based, study skills, or both)?
2. Please rate how much you agree/disagree with the following (on a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree on a five-point scale):
 - a. I better understand my coursework.

- b. My study skills and academic habits have improved.
 - c. I have formed connections with my peers.
 - d. I feel more supported and involved in my academic success.
 - e. I am in a better position to accomplish my personal and academic goals.
3. What is the skill you think you have improved the most this term as a result of tutoring? Why?
4. Any additional feedback?

I plan to send out the survey at the beginning of the final week of classes (Week 10).

Week 8 (5/15)

Today I attended a town hall with university leadership speaking on the topic of phased reopening and WOU's plans moving forward. I am feeling optimistic this week about where things are headed at WOU, with many upper administration making plans and the president releasing a statement. However, so much of what we do is dependent on the state's reopening plan, and the rate of cases feels like it is just stagnating. On a personal note, I have continued to write in my spare time, read, walking has kept me as active as I can be, and I recently discovered the free app "House Party," which is a group FaceTime call with built-in games (that are family-friendly and various). On the tutoring side of things, I can sense that the stress level of my tutors is rising as their academic commitments and study time becomes more

strenuous in their remote learning environments. I have communicated with them all and opened the door for individual follow-up and communication if needed. I have also tried to reiterate and lean on the expectations I have for them as tutors. One of my expectations remains “Human first, Student second, and Tutor after that.” This means that as a supervisor, I am receptive to the fact that my tutors are humans first and foremost (and need to attend to their mental, physical, and emotional wellness), and students second (yes, they have expertise in certain subject areas and are passionate about supporting their peers, but they are also at WOU to progress in their education as a higher priority and are always learning new material in their disciplines). One theme I noticed from the tutors was frustration at maintaining balance in all of their responsibilities, especially those who are graduating and trying to figure out the next move after WOU.

Week 9 (5/22)

I have been speaking with some other advisors/colleagues across institutions, discussing how virtual advising appointments will have a much more prominent role in the future (post-COVID 19 world). While it has been an unprecedented time of growth, new stressors, and budget constraints, hopefully, it will also allow for more visibility regarding the concerns of commuter and nontraditional students (who can't always make events and advising/tutoring appointments in person). Those are just a few personal reflections at this point. This week has gone by relatively quickly without many complaints. On the tutoring

side, we have already begun the summer recruitment of tutors for the next academic year. We have a healthy number of returners, and I thanked those who are graduating for their service to the program and WOU's students. Regarding recruitment, I have reached out to division chairs to filter messaging and our application down to faculty members in case they have recommendations. I also ran a report of all students who meet GPA and credit hour requirements for the tutoring position and reached out to them en masse. On the back end, I assessed the usage of our tutoring services over the past academic year and identified areas of need to stress in hiring based on this information along with the subject/course coverage we have with our returners. Hiring is underway, but I do admit it feels a little less exciting and personalized, with all interviews and correspondence taking place virtually (usually one of my favorite parts is getting to know candidates in person).

Week 10 (5/29)

This week has been pretty busy trying to start/finish some projects, continuing to recruit tutors and organize that process, and anticipating a wave of advisees with their advisor holds still on. On the personal side, my partner Alyssa and I have been trying to walk over our lunch break and just be active in general. Yesterday we noticed people out and about with masks on as well as some lawn chair gatherings that were appropriately socially distanced in the nearby park. It made us both smile, and also a little sad. As far as tutoring

goes, I have begun to think about what training will look like for the next academic year. Currently, I plan to implement a mix of online asynchronous training on Moodle (WOU's course management system), with modules that touch on everything from Title IX and FERPA to interpersonal skills, for example, activities, and suggested approaches, with check-in quizzes after each topic. I also plan to facilitate a collective group training over Zoom before the beginning of the school year with the entire tutor team. During that meeting, I plan to add some reflection exercises and a Kahoot quiz to encourage the tutors to think beyond their training and tutoring approach and also think about their purpose, or their "why," for being a tutor.

Week 11 (6/5)

With current events such as the killing of George Floyd and reflection on my place as an educator, it has honestly been hard to tell when the workday starts and ends. My workweek bleeds into my self-work, personal development (reading articles, listening to Black and Brown voices), and engaging in dialogue with others. From the advising side, I am continuing to check in with colleagues and students, and from the tutoring side, I drafted a statement of solidarity in response to racial injustice, referring the tutors to several statements that have come out of our institution, including one from the WOU Black Student Union. I plan to run final tutoring usage reports this week and review the results of our survey to students who utilized our services this term. Heading into the summer, one project I plan to focus on is drafting a "marketing" plan to

increase the visibility of our tutoring program, a timeline for outreach, and the expectation for tutors to advocate for tutoring services by reaching out to past and current instructors. I also hope to implement virtual “Peer-Tutor profiles” as mentioned before and look into CRLA certification/continue to strengthen my professional network on the tutoring side, depending on how much time I can devote to those projects.

A Few Takeaways

- Email fatigue is an ever-present concern, so targeted, accessible communication is key to have students come away from every interaction having retained as much important info and takeaway knowledge as possible.
- Those who supervise tutors should keep in mind that Peer-Tutors are students too, who require encouragement, communication, and occasional reminders just as any other student does.
- Adapting to remote learning and COVID-19 restrictions demand flexibility with your established procedures, your colleagues, and also yourself. Give yourself grace and take each day in turn, especially if you are working from home in a one-bedroom apartment (like myself) and your “office” is also your bedroom and a place to lounge when work is over.
- Put important projects on the calendar. This one sounds like something we do anyway, but trying to complete tutoring projects and supervise in the face of competing

work priorities, shifting responsibilities, and COVID guidelines is a bad combination if you do not plan accordingly. Create structure and a pace of work by completing projects little by little, planning them out, and blocking time on your schedule (especially if you have other responsibilities, like an advising caseload). One project that comes to mind that I will have to think about for the fall is drafting procedures for in-person tutoring following health guidelines the governor's office may give us (sanitizing, social distancing/arrangement of chairs and tables, number of people in a room, etc.).

- Our tutoring usage has dramatically reduced this term as compared to the previous two terms. This could partly be explained by remote learning and other personal, financial, etc. pressures they are facing outside of class. WOU also put a Satisfactory/No Credit grading option in place, which may have contributed to a reduced incentive to get support. A final explanatory factor is no doubt the many duties, responsibilities, challenges, and influences at play outside academic life, which might have become more pronounced and taken more attention/energy away from students.
- Although not strongly stated in my journal entries, I learned a lot from my Peer-Tutors this term, and year. I am a big believer in creating trust and openness for tutors to share their ideas for improvement of my supervision and our program, and that there is a lot of

valuable knowledge on the team as long as I remain open to hearing it.

About the Author



Keegan Gormally currently serves in a dual role as Tutoring Coordinator/Academic Success Advisor for the Student Success and Advising Office at Western Oregon University. Originally from Fort Dodge, Iowa, Keegan attended the University of Iowa and University of Kansas for his bachelor's and master's degrees before entering his current position.

Finding the Silver Lining: How COVID-19 Grew our Learning Center

By Erin Gordon
Briercrest College

Even though the last few months are a blur, I can still clearly picture a conversation with a colleague on Friday, March 13. We were standing outside the library talking in lowered voices about what an emergency transition to online learning might look like, and what the implications were for students and faculty. The provost had just announced that sending students home because of COVID-19 was not a matter of if, but a matter of when. A student was sitting nearby us wearing a mask; a symbol that the pandemic was reaching ever closer.

My mind was racing, thinking of the kinds of support that students would need. As the director of student success at a small, private college in western Canada, one of my roles is to give oversight to the campus learning center. The learning center occupies a classroom in the library and is largely staffed by peer tutors. With only a minimal presence on the campus website, we were not well situated to support students at a distance. In the middle of our conversation, I blurted “I need space on our LMS for the learning center!” That request has altered the trajectory of our learning center — perhaps permanently.

The decision to suspend face-to-face instruction came quicker than any of us anticipated. Over the weekend nearby institutions announced they were shuttering. We joined the trend. By Sunday, the news was out, and students were hastily packing up and heading home. On Monday morning, I found myself preparing materials for an emergency training session for faculty on how to support academically at-risk students in online environments. We had less than one week to transform from a residential campus into an online learning community. In contrast to the surreal clarity I have of the hallway conversation on March 13, the week of March 16th is a blur. I redesigned the remaining assignments in the academic skills course that I teach. I helped faculty think through and adjust aspects of their courses to accommodate remote learning. I trained my peer tutors on Zoom. I reached out to students receiving regular services through the learning center. I “moved” the learning center out of the library and onto our LMS. This last undertaking was perhaps the most impactful work of that week.

The learning center went live on Thursday, March 19. On the front page was a homemade video on transitioning to online learning. I recruited my teenage son and daughter to be “actors” in the video. The video opened with my daughter walking towards our front door hauling a suitcase. We even filmed clearing off a cluttered desk to set up a viable home learning space. This space became my home office and the setting for multiple Zoom meetings with students.

From mid-March through the end of April when most students had finished course requirements, a whopping 70%

of the student body accessed the learning center “course” on our LMS! In an equivalent period, the learning center would have had about 40-50 in-person visits. If I assumed that there were no repeat visits (which there were) this number would represent only about 10% of our student body. This makes our jump in traffic even more astounding.

I have not yet had an opportunity to formally survey students to ascertain the reasons for the significant uptick in student access. However, I have a few hypotheses, some of which are quite obvious. The first is that the semester disruption threw students’ sense of equilibrium off. Very few of our students have taken online classes. There were few expert learners that students could draw upon for support. As a result, students had to create other support networks. With an increased profile on LMS, the learning center was an obvious choice. Many students who had never visited the physical space of the learning center were contacting me with questions through our LMS.

My second hypothesis is that being on the LMS increased the visibility of the learning center. Every student was essentially “enrolled” in the learning center. This enabled me to send out announcements and messages to all students. During the pandemic, this was essential for passing on vital information about library and textbook resources. Because of the ease of access to the student body that I had through our LMS, I partnered with other instructional support departments, like the library and online learning directors, and passed on information from their areas to students. This

resulted in the learning center being a “hub” for academic communication.

Becoming a hub has been positive and negative. Pre-pandemic, my means for communicating to the student body about the learning center were limited mainly to campus posters and announcements sent out through student government social media channels. Communicating through the LMS increased our audience. However, I now find myself fielding questions for other offices and departments. The learning center has taken on the unanticipated role of the information desk. One way that I hope to alleviate this in the fall is by including a “commonly asked questions” or “start here” page in our LMS course that can direct students to other offices.

My third hypothesis is that moving to a virtual space reduced stigma connected to accessing support. Any student could access learning center resources, such as guides and instructional videos, at any time. No one else had to know that they had questions. On our campus, there is still some stigma around the learning center. Up until I became the director of student success two years ago, the learning center was primarily tasked with supporting students on academic probation. Although this is still an important part of my role, the mission of the learning center is to support all students in their academic journey. As a doctoral student myself, I am keenly aware of the fact that I am still learning, and I continue to develop as a learner. My vision for our learning center is that it will be a welcoming space where any student can come.

It is a space where we can share knowledge and skills and grow together.

The added vulnerability of students combined with easy access seems to be what grew our learning center. Time will tell if this trend of growth will continue. Because of our rural location, small student population, and relatively low provincial COVID-19 numbers, we are planning for face-to-face instruction with online options in September. Regardless of what on-campus numbers look like, the learning center will continue to have a strong online presence. Before COVID-19, we thought of a learning community as being a group in close physical proximity. Our students were largely in physical classrooms and lived in dorms together. COVID-19 has enlarged our definition of community to expand to digital spaces. Rather than negatively affecting the community that is our learning center, the pandemic has enhanced it. By removing our physical walls and entering a digital space, the community has been enlarged.

About the Author



Erin Gordon is the Director of Student Success at Briercrest College in Caronport, Canada. Erin has a master's degree in Education from Simpson University and is currently working on her doctorate in Developmental Education Administration at Sam Houston State University. Her research interest is supporting students in academic jeopardy.

Leading Through Change: Four Perspectives, One Team

By **Amanda A. Shah**
Rachel M. Cordy
Samantha J. Spitak
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Kent State University

Abstract

As learning center professionals, we often encourage our students to reflect on their experiences and highlight what they have learned. For our Academic Success Center team, leading through change and collaborating on this article gave us the same opportunity: to reflect on what we have learned. From the logistics of customer service and moving services online to planning for budget cuts and reopening our spaces, our team discovered several leadership lessons. We share our learning center's story through individual perspectives to highlight our shared experience during this unprecedented time in higher education.

Leading Through Change: Four Perspectives, One Team

Leading through change is particularly difficult when you do not know what is changing. Or how. Or when. Add your personal feelings to that, and self-doubt joins you at every meeting, is in between the lines of every email. But, when we

paused to be inspired, to be open, to be analytical, and to be a team, we landed in a place of comfort and confidence.

Customer Service [DeAnn, Administrative Assistant]

Once the decision was made to move all courses to remote instruction and students were sent home, our department would not require any face-to-face customer service or front-line staff. Several of the student staff were devastated. They needed the job to pay their bills and maintain their current living situations. Fortunately, our university understood the importance and value of our student employees and felt that no one should be penalized and lose their expected income. The decision was made to pay all student employees as if they were working their normal schedule so they would not see any disruption to their revenue stream. I was grateful to our leadership for this decision and was very happy to relay this information to our student staff.

The decision to pay all student employees according to their work schedule or scheduled availability was a great thing for the student staff but would cause a strain to our student payroll budget. We would be paying much more per week for all students, since we would normally only pay when students had appointments scheduled. As a department we were already facing budget cuts for the upcoming academic year, and there was the concern that we would be over budget for this year.

Speaking to the caliber of students that we employ, we had tutors, Supplemental Instruction leaders and ultimately front desk staff that agreed to work remotely – even though they

knew they would be paid regardless. I felt a great sense of pride to know that these student staffers cared about the success of other students and understood their value to our department and the University overall. The front desk staff would log on each day to field phone calls that would come into the department. Our IT department was able to get a chat box feature up and running on our website within days of working remotely. We utilized Microsoft Teams for training sessions for the new chat feature and all front desk staff were open to this new technology. I was most impressed by this group who had their entire semester uprooted. They needed to deal with their own course work disruption and still volunteered to continue their work for us, all the while having to learn to navigate these new processes. Lesson in leading through change: learn from our students' example.

Transition to Online [Samantha, Tutoring Coordinator]

When COVID-19 first spread to the U.S., it still did not feel like we as a university would be affected, at least on a large scale. When the first cases were announced in Ohio, less than an hour away from our university, fear set in. "It feels like we're in a movie," was a frequent phrase. I tried to stay calm and focused but found myself distracted by the gossip. Words like "community spread" and "unknown origin" sent surges of adrenaline through me. I was, frankly, scared, because I did not know what this would mean, but I knew change was coming.

Things moved quickly, which I commend our university leadership for. Right as news of the virus spreading came out,

we had a meeting as a department to plan what we would do if we had to swiftly move our tutoring and Supplemental Instruction services online.

We were planning for the *possibility* of moving services online. My gut said we *definitely* were. Our graduate assistants sensed this, but I could not give them definite information. I had to stay calm, when on the inside I was panicking. On a human level, I had not processed what the virus would mean for the health of my family and loved ones, let alone for my job.

Within 24 hours I learned that another university was planning to hold classes remotely, that the governor was calling for new guidelines, and that the entire social structure of the country was shifting.

Later that day I had to tell my student staff that classes were suspended for the rest of the week and would be online the following week. We did not know what this meant for tutoring. I managed to deliver this information calmly even as I was peppered with questions that I did not have answers to. I had all the same questions. My students were looking to me for leadership and I felt completely unequipped to lead them.

COVID-19 challenged (and continues to challenge) my personal anxieties as I put on a face for my students and colleagues. I also decided it was okay to be human. If I did not know something, it was okay to tell my students that. If I was uncomfortable or uncertain, I could show that. I had to be careful not to give wrong or incomplete information because I did not want them to feel more worried or confused.

In mere days, our office moved tutoring and SI entirely online via a platform that we learned in a few hours all while we were – or at least, I was – still overwhelmed with uncertainty. And we had to do it while meeting in the same space but six feet apart, or in different rooms within the same building.

My first lesson on leading through change came from that week of planning for online services: how much we take for granted our “normal” way of operating. Tutors meet with their students, in person, building valuable connections. In my day-to-day, it is easy to pop over to talk to a colleague or to hold a meeting to talk through the details of a plan. We get into easy routines of how a semester goes and what to expect from students. We consistently try to improve our programs, grow, and move forward. COVID-19 forced us to take 10 steps backwards and redo our programs with our hands tied behind our backs.

We pulled it off.

Our student leaders are to thank for this. Student employees were going to be paid for all scheduled hours for the remainder of the semester, whether they worked or not. We were relying on our tutors and SI Leaders to volunteer to work anyway so our programs could continue to run. More than half our student staff wanted to. Several said they felt compelled to help, wanted to contribute, or simply could not leave their fellow students behind. Their dedication to their work – when they did not have to do anything at all – is what rekindled my passion for this field. What an incredible

example they set for all of us. Here was a poignant lesson on leading through change: let students be your inspiration.

Once we knew the direction was remote services until further notice, our highly collaborative staff had to learn how to work from home. Instead of popping into someone's doorway, we send a chat message. It is different, but we still communicate well. When we first moved online, we held daily planning meetings. This was not to micromanage; it was because we have a great team. Our staff of four was all-hands-on-deck. Regardless of title, we were all working together to make sure all our programs were functioning. That is another lesson of leading through change: trust your colleagues. If ever you need a team, this is the time.

Now, we have found other ways to stay connected such as virtual happy hours or celebrating birthdays. Once, we held a conference call and took a walk in our respective neighborhoods (with babies and pets along with us!). It is about more than staring at a screen for eight hours.

I am thankful that my team has supported each other so well. Our meetings include visits from family, children, and pets. Our work is interrupted by technology issues and stresses we have never had to combat before. There is space for us to be real people in ways we never would have experienced otherwise. I think this is something to reflect upon and carry with us as we emerge from the pandemic. The uncertainty, the anxiety, the embarrassment as my dogs decide to bark just as I am about to say something that would otherwise sound intelligent...this is leadership while learning. I could not have this experience in the traditional office and

while it has pushed me beyond my limits, that is where learning happens. We ask our students to challenge themselves every day. It is up to us to find the opportunity in the chaos.

The Budget [Amanda, Director]

The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have an impact on higher education even following our returns to campus through significant and perhaps permanent budget and staff cuts. Although Kretovics (2011) assured that “if it is important, it will get funded” (p. 79), this unprecedented event has me wondering how much we can rely on that. In all circumstances, though, we must move forward.

I struggled with how to bring budget cut planning to the team, as our operating budget is predominantly student services and student employment. Although our budget should represent our values, there seemed no scenario, then, in which cuts would not impact students, in reduced service or loss of employment. In addition, I could not guarantee that there was no scenario that would not impact staff. We understand the value of the services we offer. However, to retain the quantity of student support offerings amid the likelihood of significant funding cuts, I struggled with the paradox of saving staff versus saving students.

I strive to practice by adaptive leadership principles and collective problem-solving (Heifetz et al., 2009), but I felt pressure to begin the assessment for cuts alone to gauge the likelihood of staffing cuts and identify an approach for budget

analysis. The department does not yet consistently use activity codes, but I wanted to examine our spending from a detailed operational perspective. With 150 undergraduate student staff, 12 regular service locations, and nearly 4,000 students served in over 30,000 sessions conducted annually, this would be a big undertaking. And everyone was up for the challenge of this approach. Finding a balance between scaling back services to accommodate an anticipated budget cut and being creative in how we deliver safe, quality academic support is a heavy responsibility and one that our team took personally. We calculated service cost by hour, by service location, and by student utilization. We translated many of our analyses to a cost per student served value. This helped us to answer many questions. Are we overstaffing (although this is a multifactored question)? When and where can we cut underutilized service hours? Where are we operating redundantly, in training and services? Is this still relevant to our services and our students today? Lesson in leading through change: ask new questions.

This novel examination revealed that we could operate more leanly. In other words, any cuts would not necessarily have as much of an impact to students as I initially feared. This also provided hope for escaping staffing cuts, especially because we are already running without a full staff. However, if I shared this, I knew the team would immediately and intuitively read, "We may never fill these empty positions." But this was a possibility that we had to use to craft what our center could look like in the next academic year, even if faced with a lesser budget.

Ultimately, we created a tiered approach to plausible budget cuts based on the data we gathered. In such uncertain terrain, we drafted concrete scenarios, the most extreme of which exceeded a 20% cut so that we could indeed be prepared for anything. This allowed us, as a team, to be strategic about what we would cut and to be prepared for fast action once we got our budget numbers. We also used some of the efficiencies to fund a new program to serve a critical student need, especially during the nearly global shift to online learning--academic coaching. This work would not have been possible without the varied perspectives and talents of our team as a whole. Lesson in leading through change: rely on your team.

We do not know what cuts specifically will look like yet as we wait for the next fiscal year's budget information. However, we were able to use this period to better understand, as a team, our operations and services. This makes us better fiscal stewards and is a process that we are building into our routine assessment and evaluation process. We do not want to lose any of our budget, but we are prepared to deal with that new number—whatever it is.

Reopening Plan [Rachel, Interim Assistant Director & Supplemental Instruction Coordinator]

Submit a plan to reopen. Ensure social distancing. Keep the students safe. Here is what other schools might be doing. We are predicting a decline in enrollment. Budgets are being cut. How will you serve students? We have questions. Read vaguely worded email

with no concrete answers. When will we know? We do not have an answer for that. Continue working from home.

Planning for fall semester and a possible return to campus has been an evolving process as jumbled and anxiety provoking as the thoughts running through my head. The only certainty is uncertainty so planning to change the plan is now a given. For my colleagues and I, this has been a struggle. We are the kind of people who are good at putting a plan together. We prepare so when there are glitches we can pivot because we have thought about what needs to happen and we know what our options are.

I have worked hard as a professional to be confident in my ability to run my programs, support my colleagues, and be flexible when things pop up. COVID-19 has taken away so many of the things I used to count on as certainties: tutors and SI leaders will facilitate their sessions on campus live and in person, I will drive to work in the morning and drive home at the end of the day, most questions about the upcoming semester will have a concrete answer. But things have changed are still changing. Despite our own fears, concerns, and reservations, my team is doing what we have always done. We celebrate birthdays. We check-in with each other. We share pictures of our kids, two-legged and four-legged alike. We schedule planning meetings and we draft proposals. When new information or mandates are shared, we make revisions.

We have asked a lot of questions. Of ourselves, of our programs of our practices, and of our administrators. We have tossed around a lot of ideas. We have pushed back and

challenged each other to think differently about what things could look like and how they could operate. We are trying to be strategic. What can we build that will work for fall semester and beyond? What have we had to create because the pandemic pushed us online that we should permanently incorporate?

Prior to COVID-19 we were planning to expand all our services. We tend to be an ambitious group. When we dream, we dream big. And we have big plans. Those plans are not going away, but they are morphing into what we can do now and what we hope to continue building on in the future. Currently, we are planning for online-only services. Of course, there is also a plan for a hybrid model of in-person and online support ready, too, just in case. As we learn more about how our campus will operate, we are running with our best guesses, outlining plans for training, and building online components that will serve students regardless of the modality with which we deliver services. Lesson in leading through change: do not give up on your plans, find a way to make it work even if it looks different than you thought it might.

For me, working through the operations logistics of our return to campus plan was the easy part. I could visualize our spaces and think about how students would move through them. I could brainstorm solutions for no-contact data entry and scheduling plans that would maximize our service capacity while preserving the safety of our students. But thinking about converting my face-to-face SI trainings to

entirely online versions was terrifying. So, I didn't. I put that possibility on the back burner, out of my field of vision and worked on other projects. Deep dive into program data? If it means avoiding online training prep, count me in! But why was the thought of online training so much more intimidating than planning for online or hybrid services? First, I had perfected my training and it practically ran itself. I was living in the sweet spot of coasting on what I had built over the last five years. But the reality of doing what we have always done, even when it works well, always comes to an end at some point. Part of me was mourning the end of that period. The other piece did not come to light until I started drafting this article. I realized that starting to craft an online training would mean our chances of returning to campus for a regular face-to-face semester were slipping away. I was holding out hope and had gotten so comfortable in my denial that actively thinking about holding our training online was not something I had processed. Lesson (reminder) in leading through change: it is ok to be mad, sad, angry, frustrated, [feeling of your choice].

With my to-do list quickly filling up with online modules to create and training materials to revise, I have started that mental shift to accepting our new reality. Having projects to complete and regular check-ins with my team to share our progress has been a huge help in moving forward. Attending free workshops and webinars, exploring web apps and learning about new platforms for engaging students in academic support makes this transition slightly less daunting. Instead of thinking about what we have lost and the heavy lift of getting everything ready for fall, I am trying to see the

opportunities. This is my chance to refine what was working and update it for our current situation.

Conclusion

There is still much uncertainty. Some days it is hard to stay motivated in the face of so many unknowns. We still hope that before too long we will be able to resume many of our face-to-face operations. And we know that some of our changes will be permanent and we will be better for it. Today, we have our team. Soon, our students will be “back.” And we have a plan. Like the weather in Ohio, we know that if we wait five minutes, it might change. Come what may, our team is ready to forge ahead with our plans to #revolutionizetheexperience because we are in this together. And together, we know we can make the impossible possible.

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About the Authors



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Keep Calm and Tutor Online! Rhody's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Jennifer Burgess

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The University of Rhode Island (URI) provides undergraduate academic support through its University College for Academic Success (UCAS). The learning support center, housed within UCAS, is called the Academic Enhancement Center (AEC) and has three primary programs. Peer tutoring is available for introductory math and science courses through the STEM Tutoring program. The Writing Center (WC) offers peer tutoring focused on supporting undergraduate writers at any stage of a writing process. The Academic Skills Development (ASD) program offers students customizable strategies and activities aimed at improving their studying and test-taking skills through a 1-credit course, UCS 160: "Success in Higher Education", and through personalized academic skills consultations. These AEC services have historically operated as in-person programs in which peer-led learning is a crucial element. The challenges presented by COVID-19 were opportunities that the AEC team leveraged to establish, expand, and enhance their web-based services for students.

Challenges

Necessity is the Mother of Innovation

In March of 2020, the country entered a time of rapid change with daily information briefings on the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) which often caused confusion. On March 11th, the University of Rhode Island announced its intention to transition into remote learning for the remainder of the semester. This announcement came on a Wednesday during URI spring break. Faculty and staff were given an additional week to prepare for this transition with a return-to-learning date of March 23rd. During this tumultuous time, the AEC staff worked closely with one another and planned several contingencies to compensate for the unknown. Timely communication that provided calm reassurance, coupled with necessary logistical support, was important in this time of anxiety and mixed signals. Due to their planning efforts, the AEC team was able to send an email to their student workers in all three programs immediately following the University announcement on March 11th, 2020. Additionally, a modified version of these emails was crafted and sent to key campus stakeholders on March 13th, 2020.

Coincidentally, at the time of the remote learning announcement, the STEM Tutoring program was in the process of planning an online tutoring pilot scheduled for the summer of 2020. Some preliminary planning had been done towards this initiative. However, a mid-semester full-scale rollout of online tutoring, without a chance to pilot, was a

challenge the team needed to overcome quickly! In addition to the technological logistics needed to integrate multiple platforms for online tutoring, tutors would need supplemental training based on technology and techniques. The STEM Tutoring team had a little over one week to plan and implement these changes.

The Writing Center had offered limited synchronous online appointments with select peer consultants through WCOOnline, so the technology was in place for the WC coordinator to transition to an online-only schedule. This transition required a logistical shift in the way writing appointments were conducted, managed, and messaged to student writers. As a peer-to-peer service, student staff buy-in was necessary for the successful implementation of changes to policies and procedures, as were new strategies for remote delivery of ongoing consultant training, communications, and support.

To support the tutors and consultants employed in the STEM Tutoring and Writing Center programs, the Academic Skills Development (ASD) program created and provided an online training workshop as employees shifted to online tutoring sessions. The workshop complemented the robust WebEx training employees also received and focused on reviewing tutoring fundamentals in a new online context. Topics such as supporting students' affective learning needs, structuring sessions, centering scaffolding, and active learning techniques ensured that student employees felt prepared and empowered technologically and pedagogically for this new work format.

Students enrolled in both of the courses offered out of the AEC were also impacted by the shift to remote learning. In both the UCS 160 course and the WRT 353 course, the first step was to revise the spring 2020 course syllabi. In UCS 160, that involved creating asynchronous lesson modules to enable students to complete the course remotely including an entirely new module addressing remote learning strategies. In WRT 353: Issues and Methods in Writing Consultancy (the prerequisite course for students applying to tutor in the Writing Center) adaptations were made while maintaining core pedagogies and interactive learning modes. This meant reimagining aspects of the course that were most integral in preparing students for future employment as writing center consultants. Assignments, activities, and course readings were revised to prioritize concepts and practices in online consultation. To preserve the collaborative nature of the course, class meetings were often conducted synchronously, taking full advantage of audio-video, screen-sharing, individual and group messaging, and break-out rooms. The synchronous meetings for WRT 353 and UCS 160 assisted students in reconnecting with the course work, with one another, and with understanding new expectations.

During this same spring break period and in response to stakeholder requests, the AEC developed a five-page guide, *Together We Can Do This*, which offered remote learning advice to all URI students. Topics included managing time and work, adjusting to technological and communications challenges, studying productively, and maintaining self-care during the crisis period. Additionally, one-to-one meetings in which

students receive advice on improving their academic work were promoted and provided by the ASD Coordinator. These were also made available as online meetings via Microsoft WebEx. Changes were made within the Starfish appointment setting system which allowed students to choose between online meetings (with or without video activated) or telephone. With support from Academic Affairs, the *Together We Can Do This* guide was disseminated to all URI undergraduate students, providing support and resources at a time of upheaval.

Establish

Making Lemonade out of Lemons

To keep a positive and growth mindset, all three AEC programs saw the challenges of this time as an opportunity to connect with their students and vital campus stakeholders to demonstrate their calm demeanor, their preparedness, and to promote their continued services. Stakeholders across campus were made aware of remote services through email communication with PDF flyers attached to help promote the services to their students. Social media was also used to spread the word of remote services to undergraduate students. The STEM Tutoring team decided to place any student in an existing weekly tutoring group into an online group to ensure that students' access to tutoring remained consistent.

The STEM tutoring program shared information with their team of over 90 tutors explaining the plan to convert all

tutoring appointments to online, and to provide supplemental training and support. A web-based training was planned to ensure that tutors were comfortable with the use of virtual tools, such as WebEx, to provide the highest quality remote tutoring possible. Additionally, Google Meet was offered to any students requiring live captioning, in place of WebEx, to ensure accessibility. This communication within hours of the campus announcement of the remote transition reassured tutors and demonstrated leadership.

The WC coordinator reached out to the 14-person consultant staff individually as well as through group email and a pre-existing group chat, which extended a sense of community and normalcy amid uncertainty. Through virtual staff training via WebEx, the WC coordinator worked with consultants on adapting familiar in-person tutoring methods to the synchronous online format. The consultants with prior online tutoring experience shared experiences and offered guidance through peer-to-peer practice sessions.

The WC coordinator took a similar approach in communications with students enrolled in WRT 353, sending individual and group emails to assure and inform, as well as to gauge new limitations in access--to technology, course materials, space, and time--that might affect students' abilities to be successful in the course. For added support, the WC coordinator also invited WRT 353 students and WC staff (and their pets) to informal "dog-friendly" open office hours via WebEx before the re-commencement of class to ask questions, chat, or vent frustrations. Consultants and consultants-in-training expressed appreciation for the outreach and valued

the opportunities to connect at a particularly stressful, isolating time in their college experience.

The Academic Skills Development program took additional steps to ease the transition for students and ensure that the faculty knew all support services remained fully available. Between March 11th and March 23rd, UCS 160 students were contacted via several emails, alerting them to the transition to online classes and preparing them for attending live class meetings via WebEx during their first week back. Subsequent lessons were converted to slide-based modules with recorded narration and made available for asynchronous online completion. The UCS 160 Instructor and Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (UTA) increased ongoing communication via emails and WebEx meetings to help guide students through the remaining weeks. Messaging around scheduling Academic Skills Consultations was modified on Starfish to guide students on how to schedule and attend virtual consultations. Advisors, Faculty, and other professional staff were reassured that program availability was ongoing, and advised on connecting students via targeted emails, infographics, and fliers.

Expand

Making It Happen

While the staff encouraged tutors to “Keep Calm and Tutor Online,” behind the scenes they worked furiously to expand their necessary skills, technologies, and infrastructure to support the shift fully online. For the STEM Tutoring

program, this expansion involved collaboration with multiple entities. The foundational principle guiding all three AEC programs during this time was to minimize disruption for students while providing support, connection, and showing compassion. Establishing these foundational principles was helpful when faced with numerous high-stakes decisions.

Since the overall goal was to minimize disruption to students as much as possible, the STEM Tutoring program used that lens as it expanded into the online platform. With every decision, STEM Tutoring coordinators asked themselves how it would impact students and what they could do to increase access to services. The program also decided to give students a “clean slate” when it came to attendance records and restrictions that come with missed tutoring sessions—every student had a new start. The STEM Tutoring program also conducted observations of recorded tutorial sessions and provided detailed feedback to tutors. Tutors observed one another as well and provided supplemental peer feedback. Surveys were attached to each appointment and reviewed daily to capture feedback, ideas, and concerns from students.

The STEM Tutoring team was able to leverage existing relationships, including the URI Information Technology Services office and the Redrock Software company, to ensure that the TutorTrac platform could successfully host online tutoring via WebEx. The team established and tested this integration to ensure it ran as smoothly as possible, then provided the technology and pedagogy training. This two-pronged approach of establishing technology and competency were vital parts of a successful rollout on the fly. Finally, the

STEM Tutoring coordinators made themselves available for tutors in virtual “office hours” for any support they needed, whether it was someone to connect with about their tutoring sessions or a friendly face. Providing some real-time support and connection during a time of isolation was prioritized from the start.

Although the Writing Center had an established online option, students were largely conditioned to expect in-person consultations in the physical Writing Center space, where they were assisted by reception staff and worked side-by-side with consultants. Pre-COVID, students rarely utilized audio-visual features when they did book online appointments. When planning the online-only schedule, these considerations foregrounded the implementation. To ease the online transition for student writers in the absence of in-person, on-demand support, the WC coordinator created a dedicated university email account to be staffed by on-duty consultants to help students navigate the system and troubleshoot potential technical issues in real-time. To ensure accessibility, the appointment form was also updated to include an option for live captioning through Google Meet by request. Professor verification of visit, previously provided by consultants in hand-written form, was also now sent by email. Finally, consultations across the schedule, previously offered as 25- or 50-minute appointment slots, were extended to a default 50-minute slot to allow additional adjustment time and room for unexpected challenges.

The Academic Skills Development program's focus was primarily on providing the information students, advisors, and others needed to ease what was understandably a significant transition for students. There was concern that students would struggle to adapt amidst such significant and sudden disruption, and that many would not be able to adjust. With no weekly in-class contact to anchor the course and maintain connections with students, UCS160 instructors and undergraduate TAs substantially increased their email and online office hours communications with students. Their primary goal was to reconnect with all students and make sure they had a lifeline to support as they made strategic adjustments to their studying. Weekly lessons and assignments continued to focus on specific topics, but online correspondence became more directly about troubleshooting problems that arose for students as their other courses changed format and an alternative grading system was introduced.

Enhance

Making It Better!

With the one-week turnaround time between the announcement of online learning support and the full rollout within all three programs, staff initially focused on the successful implementation of the basic technological and skill-based components. After the program was fully functional, staff shifted into finding ways to enhance the support being provided online. Additionally, the Academic Enhancement Center Director ensured that full-time staff worked

collaboratively to create a “Temporary Assumption of Duties” plan if any coordinator fell ill. This plan allowed for cross-training, sharing of vital program information, and increased confidence despite global uncertainties.

The STEM Tutoring program coordinators took each opportunity they could to attend webinars, read articles, and send weekly emails with reminders and tips to tutors. Enhancing their knowledge of remote tutoring strategies and passing that information to tutors via email and in a shared learning management system called Sakai helped motivate tutors to provide the best possible experience for their students. Maintaining regular communication and a sense of normalcy also enhanced the experience for tutors. In end-of-semester meetings with STEM tutors, it was widely reported that tutors appreciated the predictability of communication from the staff, the calm and assuring tone of emails, and the continued reminders that they were appreciated. Communication to students and faculty was also enhanced, especially moving into the summer, with regular email updates, new website and LMS site content, and even videos showcasing the services the AEC provides. Enhancement of the AEC’s web-based marketing content is and will continue to be key as the campus-based center aims to showcase its free, available services at a time when private online tutoring advertisements are at a peak.

Some of the STEM team’s best-learned lessons throughout this transition came from tutors’ first-hand experience. Trusting and learning from STEM tutors was key in enhancing

the tutorial support. STEM tutors were able to give insight on important factors such as group sizes in the virtual setting, how often the students wanted to meet each week, and how recorded tutoring sessions could be best utilized. By trusting the expertise of the tutors, the STEM team was able to take these suggestions, rethink policies, and better meet the needs of students in this unprecedented time while simultaneously demonstrating to tutors that their voices are heard.

The strong sense of community developed in WRT 353 and nurtured through intensive support enabled a smooth transition and inspired confidence between members of the Writing Center staff. Continuing weekly staff meetings allowed WC staff time to debrief on tutoring experiences, share resources, and connect as a community in real-time. These meetings gave the staff opportunities to experiment together with new modes of technology. This creative experimentation, combined with practical, real-time feedback from consultants and student writers, guided the evolution of online processes and initiatives. In the absence of being able to physically visit classes to promote services, the WC created resources for wide-spread campus outreach, such as a video overview of services, as well as targeted outreach for specific campus partners, such as a co-curricular reflective writing workshop recorded in collaboration with the Doctor of Pharmacy program. Pivoting to virtual technologies resulted in the creation of lasting, shareable resources with the potential to reach more students.

Writing consultants also visited virtual class sessions of WRT 353 to help lead mock tutoring activities and discussions

using breakout rooms, shared and direct chat functions, and screen sharing, which provided surprising new avenues of engagement and reflection. To ensure accessibility and equity, the WC coordinator elicited students' preferences for moving forward; students voted unanimously to continue synchronous weekly meetings. By engaging students in course decision-making, demonstrating flexibility, and explicitly expressing consistent, genuine interest in their well-being above course particulars, the WC coordinator modeled core tutoring values of collaboration, adaptability, and compassion in concrete practice, which in turn gave students the openness to learn and "play" in a new environment.

The Academic Skills Development program immediately began applying lessons learned during the COVID transition into the creation of a fully online UCS160 course combining topic-specific, self-guided modules with accompanying weekly live discussion groups. A full summer semester online UCS 160 course was created by early June and delivered to over 300 incoming students during a six-week summer bridge program. Work was completed to expand UCS 160 even further and it is being offered this fall in a full semester online format.

Recognizing an increased need for self-guided study skills development, the ASD program created and launched a new web portal called *Study Your Way to Success*. This visually appealing, easy to navigate portal connects students with the best the web has to offer in the way of practical strategies for textbook reading, planning, test-taking, and minimizing

procrastination and distraction. The program also leveraged feedback from the online tutoring workshops conducted in April to develop a workshop that supports colleagues and students from across the university. This campus-wide workshop is being offered several times this fall in a remote format.

The Rhode Ahead

The University made its announcement to operate under a hybrid model for fall 2020 in late June. The staff has already begun developing plans, contingencies, and communication to assuage concerns of staff and students while centering safety. Strategic planning, clear communication, creative use of space, and a continued commitment to regular policy review will be critical as the AEC continues to operate in the face of uncertainty. After reflecting on the challenges, expansions, and enhancements of the past 4 months, the AEC staff agrees that a key contributing factor in the center's ability to adapt had been the recent establishment of an AEC Director position. The hiring of an AEC Director in February provided the leadership and focus necessary for the team to establish common goals, create consistency across programs, manage change, and foster a sense of unity.

Based on feedback from tutors and students since March, the STEM Tutoring program reduced the size of tutoring groups online to maximize effectiveness and minimize bandwidth challenges. The coordinators intend to continue making time to connect with colleagues to share ideas. They

maintain the “we’re in this together” mentality with URI colleagues as well as other higher education partners and have embodied this mentality through sharing of resources such as their time, screenshots, and other tools for campuses facing online tutoring challenges.

In fall 2020, the Writing Center will continue to offer a full schedule of synchronous online appointments based on demonstrated usage patterns during spring and summer, including evening and weekend hours for maximum accessibility. Toward that end, the WC coordinator and consultant staff are also excited to expand into new territory in the form of asynchronous tutoring, which will allow even greater flexibility for student writers seeking support as well as for student consultants balancing myriad demands of a hybrid education model. The WC coordinator is currently focused on developing processes and training materials based on best practices in the field of Writing Center Studies, to ensure consultants are empowered and well-prepared to execute the roll-out in a manner that maintains the highest level of quality and aligns with the WRT 353 curriculum, including additional mentorship and support for new staff members.

The Academic Skills Development program is currently preparing additional supports for new and returning students to ease their transition to the new hybrid learning environment. This new project will offer five self-guided learning modules with accompanying discussion groups on high-interest topics for students seeking to start their

semesters strong under a new hybrid model. The modules were made available to all URI students via the AEC website in August, and module-specific discussion groups facilitated by AEC professional staff during the week of August 31- Sept. 4 gave students a chance to connect and share questions and strategies.

For the first time, UCS 160 will be offered in fall 2020 both as a full semester online course and as an in-person class. A goal looking ahead is to see whether a full-semester online format, with asynchronous modules and flexible group discussions, will make the course accessible to more students. Data collected and analyzed from both formats will be compared to better understand the pedagogical affordances of each, with an eye on being able to make better recommendations to students seeking to learn from UCS 160 in the future. Similarly, the fall 2020 plan for Academic Skills Consultations is to conduct both in-person and online meetings.

The AEC recognizes that in a world of uncertainty, teams must prepare as much as possible for a multitude of potential outcomes. The goal of planning is not to arrive at an inflexible formula but is to engage the planning process to assist in conceptualizing contingency plans and developing creative solutions. As our university will no doubt continue to expand technologically, we must infuse our plans with the available technology resources, and continually leverage them. Making time to communicate information to student workers, stakeholders and colleagues is key to inspiring confidence in the plan and helps maintain a sense of community in this

virtual world. With unknowns still looming ahead, the AEC is steadfast in its goal to support student learning and academic success at the University of Rhode Island. As URI enters into a hybrid model of instruction this fall, the AEC will continue to analyze internal processes, anecdotal information, stakeholder feedback, and best practices to provide top quality academic support services while centering student and staff safety.

Of Note

Complete details about each of these programs, schedules, contact information, and self-service study resources are all available on the AEC website at uri.edu/aec. Questions can be sent to Jennifer Burgess, Director of the Academic Enhancement Center via email at jlburgess@uri.edu

About the Authors



Jennifer Burgess (M.Ed., M.S.), Director, Academic Enhancement Center & Interim Coordinator of STEM Tutoring, oversees support services and their coordinators in the

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Jennifer completed her BA in Political Science and Master's Degree in Counselor Education from NC State University. Jennifer also holds an MS in Human Resources and Labor Relations from URI. After working at NC State and Northeastern University, she joined the URI's Advising Programs for Student Athletes staff in Fall 2013 providing academic support to varsity student

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athletes. She was then selected as the AEC's Coordinator of STEM Tutoring in July 2018. Jennifer became Director in February 2020.

His work is focused on helping students develop the skills and strategies needed to succeed in their academic work, including the UCS 160: Success in Higher Education course, workshops, and individual and small group consultations with students. Dr. Hayes also works with URI faculty and staff to develop and facilitate training for TAs and tutors.

In addition to his focus on learning skills, Dr. Hayes develops and facilitates workshops focusing on issues related to equity and inclusion in higher education. He began his career as a teacher and program coordinator in the field of adult education, and has worked at the Academic Enhancement Center since 2004.



Ceileidh Just (M.Ed.), Coordinator of STEM Tutoring, works to provide an effective and efficient STEM tutoring program to students at the University of Rhode Island (URI).

She co-supervises the STEM tutors at the Academic Enhancement Center and manages the reception team. Ceileidh completed her B.A. in Sociology at the University of Rhode Island in 2014 and completed her M.Ed. in Higher Education at Providence College in 2019. She has been working in the higher education field since 2015 and has served in multiple capacities including admissions, international student support, and tutorial coordination. Ceileidh is passionate about involvement on campus and is deeply involved with diversity and inclusion efforts at URI.



Heather Price (M.F.A), Coordinator, Undergraduate Writing Center, has devoted her professional life to the practice and teaching of writing.

As coordinator of the URI Writing Center, she supervises writing consultants and reception staff in their work supporting undergraduate writers across the curriculum. She teaches WRT 353: Issues and Methods in Writing Consultancy, the prerequisite consultant training course, in the Writing & Rhetoric department.

Heather has taught in the Writing Studies and Creative Writing departments at Roger Williams University, worked as a Writing Specialist in the Bryant University Writing Center, and coordinated the International Engineering Program at URI. A published poet, she holds an M.A. from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from The Ohio State University.

Walking our Path through the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Cassandra Feidt

Bonnie Ostrand

Rasmussen College

As a program, we had successfully transitioned to making all tutoring options online before the pandemic, so in many ways, we have been able to go about the majority of our business much as usual. We train our peer tutors through our fully online Level I CRLA certification process, and our training process equips them to offer highly effective online tutoring. Remote work was already mainstream for our Learning Services Coordinators and peer tutors alike, so our general recruiting, hiring, and training practices have gone unchanged. Instead of needing to focus on rapidly scaling up online offerings, we have been able to concentrate on addressing the profound personal support needs of our tutors and adapting some of our policies, procedures, and best practices as life with COVID-19 demands. But make no mistake, despite having existing infrastructure for online tutoring, learning center management has felt like organized chaos, and we continue to look for ways to rise to the occasion.

In a relatively short time, we have come to more fully appreciate the importance of leading by example, balancing our previous notions of professionalism with the need to show

vulnerability and demonstrate coping mechanisms with candor. Our tutors work under the kinds of personal constraints that we do, and they are also adjusting to a significant increase in tutoring session volume, which, despite being a success worth celebrating, has added to their stress. Peer tutors are the face of our institution, serving as a professional learning community to each other and their tutees. In our current environment, they serve in this capacity to a far greater extent than ever before. Our tutors and students need the best of our humanity right now, and we are leading them all empathy-first.

Emotional Support for Tutors

As a Learning Services team, we immediately felt what we imagine many felt across other institutions: Anxiety, worry, panic, and a plethora of questions. Some of which included: What does this mean for us as employees? What does this mean for our tutors and our students? How can we support our tutors and students? Will we be able to rise above this challenge? What changes will we have to make? What else will come our way as time goes on? As a team, we connected quickly to ensure consistency regarding our communication with our tutors and our immediate plans for support. We anticipated our peer tutors and students might have additional needs in the Spring Quarter of 2020. As our peer tutors are also students, our first thoughts were around student support. We considered another layer of questions: How are our students cognitively and emotionally processing this situation? How have their lives been affected as a result of

the pandemic? What new factors might be contributing to their academic progress? Through initial conversations with peer tutors, we found that individual experiences varied widely from minimal impact to significant income, childcare, and health issues and concerns. For example, some tutors wished to increase their work hours to help supplement the family income. Other tutors needed to re-arrange their availability due to child care needs at home. In addition to these practical concerns, emotional factors such as increases in fear, worry, anxiety, and depression affected our peer tutors in unique and changing ways. Some of our tutors expressed this by admitting feelings of helplessness and news addiction; others expressed worry over schooling their children and struggled to explain to their children what was happening and why things were different.

Through these conversations, it became clear that to support our student body, we first needed to support our peer tutors. Due to these extenuating circumstances, we anticipated an increase in tutoring sessions, with students potentially presenting heightened emotions during tutoring sessions. To prepare our peer tutors, we focused on individual discussions, team meetings, and training content.

One on One Discussions

In a changing and uncertain world, we sought to ensure our peer tutors felt safe within individual teams and their roles. We allowed them an opportunity to express their feelings, share their concerns, and let us know what they needed. Some tutors requested functional changes such as

schedule updates to accommodate income or family care needs. Others wanted to talk through worries or anxious thoughts. It was essential to provide safe spaces for them to discuss individual needs, concerns, and questions to resume tutoring, knowing they had our support.

Training and Meetings

It was critical to support our peer tutors with tips, strategies, and advice for their personal needs throughout this pandemic and prepare them for working with students. Through training sessions, we explained that as we are experiencing this pandemic, so are our students. More than ever, we needed to present a safe and welcoming space to support their academic progress. Due to these new challenges, we expected our students to express more frustration, a lack of patience, and potentially changing emotions. We included the following components in our training plans:

Individual Tips for Stress and Anxiety Management

We reminded tutors that they are not alone in this situation and that we are all in this together. Fostering that sense of community was a primary focus. Expressing and acknowledging gratitude for all that we have during this time is also beneficial for stress reduction. Time was allowed for everyone to express their feelings about what they are grateful for despite the challenging situation we find ourselves in. We reminded tutors to limit their news intake and exposure to foster a greater sense of control over the information provided by our 24/7 news cycle. We advised tutors that while it is important to stay informed, there is a saturation point by

which too much information results in feelings of helplessness or increased stress and anxiety. As an example, we shared that spending 30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes after dinner to catch up on the news while avoiding news exposure before bedtime, helped many of us to manage our stress levels. In times of uncertainty, embracing structure and routine as well as "healthy distractions" can allow us to take more control over our everyday lives. These healthy distractions could be related to school work, tutoring, exercise, cooking, or anything that is controllable and comforting. Finally, we discussed the importance of staying connected, both in our friend and family units and with each other as a team.

Anticipating Student Needs

In addition to providing personal support, we also prepared our tutors for student needs. While ideal tutoring may take place in an uninterrupted, quiet environment that allows for focus, controlling that environment may be challenging for adult learners under normal circumstances, much less during a pandemic. We reminded tutors that just like them, students might find themselves in unique school, work, and home situations that affect their pre-existing routines. As a result, increased student anxiety, frustration, and confusion would most likely be present. To effectively support students, we felt the focus needed to be on kindness along with clear, specific, and direct communication to "cut through the noise" of increased mental stimulation. We

advised tutors to exercise patience, understanding, and flexibility out of an awareness that with changing home environments, students may be distracted by children and family needs during tutoring sessions. Allowing students the time to tend to these needs was essential in creating a space of inclusivity and support. One final piece of advice was to give students the benefit of the doubt during sessions, as they might be having a harder time focusing on content and articulating their needs. Asking investigative questions and allowing space for students to process information, is vital in advancing the learning process.

Debriefing & Coaching Sessions

As our peer tutors began working with students, we did see an increase in tutoring sessions, with some students presenting heightened emotions that at times proved challenging for our tutors. For example, one of our tutors reached out after a session reporting frustration. He shared that the student was very impatient and short-tempered, and while he handled the session well, he felt his frustration increase. This tutor had dealt with these student situations before, and it was clear that his stress levels were impacting his reaction. In short, his threshold for objectively processing and responding to these situations was lower. To coach this tutor, the initial training points were reiterated to help him view the interaction more objectively. As a team, we found ourselves having more of these conversations to work through those encounters. Reminding peer tutors of what students are experiencing, reiterating de-personalization techniques, and

supporting them through sessions, helped us manage the needs of our peer tutors and those of our students.

Cultivating a Team Culture

An additional focus area for us is fostering a healthy team environment to keep our tutors connected. Our tutors work with each other on projects, provide feedback to each other on tutoring sessions, and engage in team-building events. We believe this helps contribute to feelings of connectedness, a sense of purpose, and healthy distractions during a time of uncertainty.

Operational Practicalities

As remote work and personal life responsibilities continue to collide with no end in sight, our recruiting and hiring process has remained largely the same, albeit with sensitivity to the sustained stresses our applicant pool continues to experience. In the early days of the pandemic, some of us hoped (and, to an extent, feared) a massive influx of work-study student tutor applications as our nation suffered staggering job losses and remote work options became more attractive as a matter of personal safety. We were treading water on meeting the immediate needs of our teams and academic programs, and the prospect of a wave of applicants, coupled with a rising tide of increased tutoring usage, threatened to pull us underwater.

While we are currently outpacing our typical rate of hiring, our applicant pool is still more a story of famine than feast; even though it is business as usual with us recruiting in a

remote capacity, we as coordinators have engaged in aggressive marketing strategies and called upon faculty to generate a pipeline to meet the increased demand for tutoring sessions that we are experiencing. Recent applicants have shown some reluctance at the prospect of taking on a new responsibility in the face of enduring uncertainty. They have been candid with us throughout the interview process and have acknowledged the additional burdens they are carrying these days, whether in terms of the pandemic or the ongoing trauma they are experiencing from the Black Lives Matter movement and general social unrest. They have been cautious and vulnerable in inquiring about our expectations for remote work. They are motivated by the prospect of helping others and sharing their love of learning, but they are also waiting for the proverbial other shoe to drop.

Although not without its challenges, one bright spot in recent months has been a significant increase in tutoring sessions that our team has experienced. We have typically seen lower usage during spring and summer terms, but we saw our highest ever tutoring usage during our spring quarter from April to June. With over 2000 online tutoring sessions that approximately 70 peer tutors conducted over the spring 2020 academic quarter, our program is currently pacing at a 50% increase in tutoring sessions over last July. Also, we have seen a 35% increase for the current quarter over the average usage of the previous four quarters. Critically, we continue to see extremely high levels of satisfaction in our post-session surveys. This data encourages us that on the whole, we are successfully reaching students where they are, right in the

middle of 2020 and all its complications. Only time will tell if the increase in usage is a temporary crisis response, but from our vantage point, it seems like we have reached a point of inflection for online tutoring usage from which there will be no turning back.

The Road Ahead

While pivoting to a fully online modality was not much of an adjustment for us in and of itself, our unique vantage point puts the additional challenges that we are facing right alongside our fellow institutions as the pandemic persists into sharp focus. Specifically, continued functioning during the pandemic demands increased attention to the emotional support needs of our student tutors, some fine-tuning of some of our processes and procedures, and strategic planning to meet the demands of much higher levels of tutoring usage. Managing a successful online tutoring program has always depended upon relationship building. However, the cultivation of deep bonds within our staff and providing holistic tutor and student support is more mission-critical than ever. We hope our experience inspires confidence: as much as we share in so many of the current struggles facing learning assistance professionals nationwide, we can assert that quality online peer tutoring, even amid a pandemic, is wholly possible. What is required of us is human connection.

About the Authors



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Collaborative Leadership: Growing and Reflecting as a Team during COVID-19

By Anne Kelly

Jessie LaChance

Sohaib Mirza

Katie Jane Torma

Loyola University Chicago

Introduction

Creating an environment that values shared leadership, involving student leaders in key decision-making processes, and amplifying the student voice are fundamental values within Loyola University Chicago's (LUC) Tutoring Center. The transition online due to COVID-19 would not have been successful without the collective efforts of the entire Tutoring Center peer-led academic support team. Through enacting the principles of collaborative, active learning, the Tutoring Center positions itself as a learning organization that works to learn with and from the strengths and assets of each member of the team regardless of position. These values and ideas on leadership are reflected in the organizational structure and approach to administratively implementing the Supplemental Instruction (SI) and Peer Tutoring programs.

As the Associate Director of the Tutoring Center overseeing peer-led academic support programs, I owe the success of this transition to the exceptional work of the Tutoring Center's Coordinator, Jessie LaChance, and her leadership with the Training & Professional Development Committee (TPDC).

This committee is made up of ten senior SI Leaders and Peer Tutors who train, mentor, and observe small groups or “pods” of their peers. Some pods are subject-specific or relate to a certain population, such as our Achieving College Excellence (ACE) pod made up of tutors who serve TRIO students. A significant responsibility of TPDC is to co-facilitate our pre-semester training and bi-weekly meetings. Sohaib Mirza and Katie Jane Torma are members of this committee, who have co-written this article with Jessie and me.

The following transcribed Zoom call is used as a creative method to understand how the LUC SI and Peer Tutor programs transitioned online. Zoom as our online platform can also represent an egalitarian leadership style where everyone’s video boxes are the same size and can showcase the multiplicity of leadership. We, as the four authors, recorded an hour video call reflecting on the success and challenges of the transition. The call was then transcribed by Sohaib and Katie Jane and edited as a team to identify emerging themes. These themes include supporting one another, appreciation and gratitude, transition successes, and shared leadership and growth. Underlying threads throughout all the themes included empathy, connectedness, community, and collaboration. This call allowed us a unique opportunity to reflect on the past six months and identify how we have grown together as a team.

Team Zoom Conversation

Initial Reflections

Annie Kelly (she/her/hers): What have been your initial reflections as you look back on the transition from in-person to online within the Tutoring Center due to COVID-19?

Katie Jane Torma (she/her/hers): I remember being terrified of how I am going to switch my sessions to online! How was I going to build the same community that I was able to have with my students in person over the online platform? It was terrifying!

Sohaib Mirza (he/him/his): Yeah, and I think a lot of us were caught off guard because COVID was downplayed, especially in America. It was a difficult situation, but we had to come together and generate empathy. I remember conducting an observation via Zoom and I discovered the tutor had a summer internship canceled. I remember being super bummed for her, but at the same time, I had to help her remain optimistic about her goals and plans. I think that interaction resembles how we all had to treat our interactions with one another because everyone had hardship, and some were facing it more than others.

Jessie LaChance (she/her/hers): Yeah, and we were in the middle of recruitment for fall! [laughing] On top of trying to acknowledge students' feelings and emotions, we were still

trying to keep the day-to-day operations of the Tutoring Center going, too.

AK: I remember Jessie and I rapidly dividing and conquering large projects and figuring out how we could support our student staff. To be transparent, Jessie and I were dealing with our own types of emotions and difficulties in processing this, as well.

Supporting One Another

JL: Ensuring peer leaders were supported and had a smooth online transition was important. So, we created a training video to show how to facilitate a virtual tutoring session. We discussed it is not necessarily what any of us could have predicted or wanted, but that we can do this together.

KJT: I remember watching that! That made me smile so much because Annie said something like “you cheese balls” and it stuck with me [laughing] I don't know why, but just that little thing that Annie said got me through and made me motivated to want to go to all these sessions.

SM: It was great to see Annie and Jessie coming together to construct that video, take the time to comfort us tutors, and say, “Hey, we'll get through this together.”

AK: Jessie and I have discussed how do we balance being a leader who wants to empathize while also providing the appropriate amount of energy and optimism? It's a delicate balance because you don't want to convey toxic positivity, and

you also want to try to uplift people during a difficult time. For me, Jessie and I needed to be talking and processing COVID-19 impacts together. Then, later, George Floyd's murder among others and Black Lives Matter. Carving out time to process, I think, is important. And, then, how do we model that for you all? How can we encourage you during your sessions to process outside-of-class events with your students and your fellow peers?

KJT: I think carving out time is important. That's why at every one of my sessions, or pod meetings, I always start with five minutes of debriefing. I remember that you all had created a space to debrief what had been going on with the Black Lives Matter movement, and that space was important to me because I was allowed to process what was going on with you all.

SM: I made sure to remind my pod members that communication is important, and they can reach out to me or talk to whoever makes them feel comfortable. This was important for my pod to understand like, "Hey, a lot is going on, but there are still people looking out for us who have our backs." So, I think that definitely helped with the transition among our pods.

JL: One thing I wanted to be mindful of how is how we model this when TPDC is together. How do we practice talking about what's going on or acknowledge feelings? Pulling from

my counseling background, it was important to make sure that we normalized and validated our experiences. There's grief in not being able to say goodbye on your terms, especially for seniors. We had to make sure we acknowledge that, but also celebrate all the great work that we have been doing all year together.

Appreciation & Gratitude

AK: That brings back fond memories of the virtual end of the year celebrations and events!

KJT: I remember making a Google Form for the Tutoring Center peer leaders who were graduating. It had some basic questions about their Tutoring Center experience and favorite memory. I put that into a PowerPoint, and we had a zoom celebration event where we went through all of the slides! I think it was special for them to be recognized and still feel connected even though it was such an abrupt ending.

SM: Katie Jane, I think you also did a great job keeping up with the weekly pod shout outs during the transition! The shout outs were facilitated through having us fill out a google form giving each other kudos. You could see the smiles when you were reading them during virtual bi-weekly meetings!

JL: Yeah, and I also really loved your idea of soliciting “thank you’s” from students to their tutors or SI Leaders! Reading the hundreds of students that thanked their peer leaders for

making the transition easier and for the support throughout the semester was powerful.

Transition Successes

AK: What are you most proud of during that transition from in-person to online?

KJT: I think I'm most proud of the community I built with my pod. I remember our first pod bi-weekly meeting after going online. Everyone was talking about how difficult and different it was and how sad it was to have to go home and not see your students. So, at the end of the meeting, I gave everyone a homework assignment to send something in our group chat that makes you laugh!

SM: I was happy with the way my fellow TPDC members and I created content for the bi-weekly meetings. When it was my turn to create the meeting, I remember another TPDC member and I had a zoom call for hours to make sure our activities were interactive, and the ice breakers helped to build community and self-reflection.

JL: That was a decision we had to come up with quickly. We decided to have TPDC facilitate bi-weekly meetings in their small pods made more sense than having a Zoom room of 100. The most common feedback I heard from student staff was that they loved the connection they got in those meetings. They felt supported, and they knew the Tutoring Center was there for them, too.

KJT: Yeah, that's how I felt too! Being a TPDC pod leader, I had to facilitate the discussions, but those in my pod were also there to help me. It was really nice to hear from other tutors that were going through the same things had ideas to help me better my sessions.

AK: I'm most proud of our team is that we had to constantly innovate. Jessie and I talk a lot about the waterfall effect. So, first, how do we model this experience for TPDC, and then, how do you bring that to your pods, and, finally, how will the SI Leaders and Peer Tutors in your pods bring it to their students in their sessions. This has made us take more time to rethink some of the things we were doing. For instance, Jessie and I created a new summer research assistant position to give student leaders some research experience for those who lost internships. Rethinking and finding new ways to give you outlets to be able to share your experience as Loyola students and as members of the Tutoring Center is important.

SM: I participated in one of the research assistant's surveys, and it helped me self-reflect on the transition. It reminded me about the process and how efficiently we were able to put things together. It makes me very proud that we were able to do that collectively during a time that was pushing us apart more or less physically.

KJT: I think what was so successful is that Jessie and Annie let us take charge of our sessions. You gave us resources and then let us craft our online sessions and our online pod meetings to

how we wanted them to be. I think having that responsibility as peer leaders was important.

JL: One of the things I'm most proud of the Tutoring Center is seeing everyone to rise to the challenge. Seeing everybody create amazing resources, host strong sessions, and come up with cool ideas of how to facilitate an activity online has been very awe-inspiring.

Shared Leadership & Growth

AK: What do you think about what leadership means now, and how did you see yourself grow as a leader during this transition?

KJT: I think how I grew is that I learned how to listen. You must be able to empathize with others especially during hard times, but you can't do that without being a good listener.

SM: An aspect of leadership I saw personal growth was the realization of how important communication is during times of need because ideas and people get lost when a lot is going on. I can recall times where there weren't many people reaching out to me, but I wanted to be that person taking the initiative to reach out to others, like my pod members and tutees.

KJT: Regarding my work with appreciations on TPDC, recognizing other peer leaders' strengths and what they're doing well-motivated my pod to try and do their best in each

session because they felt seen, heard, and valued. I would send a message in our group chat every week and say something that I thought a tutor was doing well. Everyone wanted to get their shout out, so they were really trying their best, and felt appreciated by the shout outs that I'd give them.

JL: One of my biggest struggles with leadership during the transition was trying to figure out how to supervise a hundred students that I don't get to see in person regularly anymore. How do I still connect without having the student swing by my desk and ask me a question? How do I maintain a work-life balance when I'm plugged in all the time? How do we have these really important conversations in this online space? I've really had to learn how I can "show up" for our staff in this online space--which I'm still figuring out.

AK: Leading students or professional staff can be intimidating because you want to make sure all feel valued and supported, and there is no perfect recipe for it. I think an interesting component with Zoom and leadership is that it can facilitate a non-hierarchical environment. All our little video boxes are equal with no one being larger or more important than the other. There are always power dynamics involved, but how do we try to deconstruct those as much as possible.

JL: There have been a lot of things happening emotionally, physically, mentally, and financially for so many people and even more so depending on what your identities are. Being able to come into this space and say, "Hey, here's where I'm at

today, and this is the best I can do right now” has been really helpful and important.

KJT: Jessie something I think that you do really well is you make it known that you're always going to be there for us. I know that I can always rely on you, and you're like that with all of the student leaders and tutees. Annie, something that I think that you do really well is you will always make it known when you think that we're doing something right. It just makes my day and it pushes me forward, and I think that was really important with the transition online. Something I love about both of you is that students are at the forefront of your minds.

SM: I love how even though Annie and Jessie are technically in a higher position than us, I never think of it that way when I am interacting with you both. Y'all are just outstanding women leaders and are truly inspiring individuals and professionals for many of us. I think that's really important in keeping our Tutoring Center well-established and well-functioning.

AK: Thank you, Katie Jane and Sohaib, for fueling our hearts and minds. Thank you to Jessie for being an outstanding professional. This is a fantastic team that has grown together during a tough transition.

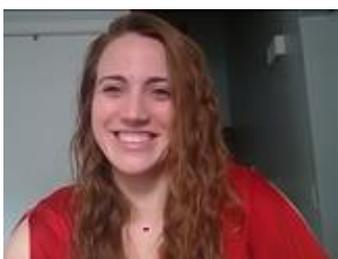
Conclusion

The Tutoring Center quickly adapted to meet the needs of students by relying on our flexible and passionate team of staff and student leaders. This team displayed authentic collaboration and empathy to serve Loyola students in their continued academic success and goals. The themes that emerged from the reflective Zoom conversation include the importance of supporting one another during the transition, expressing appreciation and gratitude, reflecting on successes, and identifying leadership growth individually and collectively. Through supporting each other, it was important for time to be set aside to check-in and process events that extended beyond the Tutoring Center. We continued our practice of sharing appreciations and gratitude, especially during the closure of the year. Reflecting on successes allowed us to understand that the key decisions made early on allowed us to efficiently train peer leaders on online active learning strategies and for TPDC leaders to be empowered to facilitate bi-weekly trainings. Each teammate rose to the challenge to lead and navigate new technologies, ways of conducting sessions and managing teams, and embodying that the success of one is the success of all. As the Tutoring Center transitions into a new academic year, expressing gratitude, sharing leadership, and supporting one another will assist us in embracing new challenges to best serve our students.

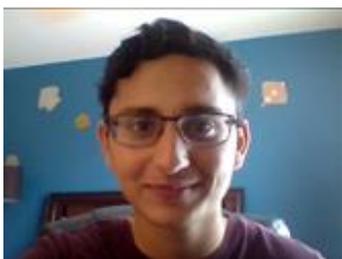
About the Authors



Annie Kelly is the Associate Director of the Tutoring Center at Loyola University Chicago (LUC) and leads peer-led academic support programs, including Supplemental Instruction and Peer Tutoring. She is completing her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at LUC.



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Student Workers as Learning & Writing Center Leaders on a Residential Campus

By **Julia Bleakney**

James Holsinger

Elon University

At Elon University—a selective, mid-sized private university—the Writing Center in the Center for Writing Excellence and Learning Assistance in the Koenigsberger Learning Center are separate offices within an academic commons with shared goals of providing academic support to reinforce and supplement the university curriculum. We also share one key characteristic: the vast majority of employees who provide this support are students who work as peer consultants. As we considered how our learning centers rose to the challenge during the Covid-19 pandemic, we realized that we needed to broaden the discussion of who leads in a learning center. In this reflection, we describe the ways that our peer consultants exceeded expectations during spring 2020, and we argue that our consultants met the challenge, not although Elon is a residential campus, but rather because of the university’s emphasis on and valuing of one-to-one peer interaction.

The adjustment for both of us, as for writing and learning centers across the country, was abrupt. After discussing different options with student leaders, we agreed that our priority was to maintain as much consistency as possible for

both students and consultants. Before spring break, we moved all the consultants to “online-only” availability in our appointment systems, prepared a set of instructions on how to use online consulting, and ran social media posts to explain how to use the online platforms. New initiatives require careful messaging, ample training, and time to troubleshoot before rollout, but in this case, we rushed to create how-to guides, offered consultants hastily-prepared guidelines and strategies via email, and relied on lead consultants to help troubleshoot difficulties as they arose.

Yet despite this quick and chaotic adjustment, our consultants adapted quickly to new technologies and online assistance, and based on survey data, students found the tutoring experience just as helpful as the in-person assistance to which they were accustomed.

To get a sense of the consultants’ experience, we surveyed our student workers after the spring semester. We were struck by the way our student staff perceived the importance of their work. In the words of one consultant, “The Writing Center has always been a place for collaboration between people who don’t know each other, and I think that sense of community building...was very important during remote learning.” A Learning Assistance consultant echoes this remark, stating that online tutoring “brought me and the students I tutor some sense of normalcy by interacting with each other again, even if just by video chat.” During a time of disorientation, fear, and confusion, online tutoring offered more than just help on a given assignment: it also provided a connection to

campus that so many students missed when classes shifted online.

There were, of course, challenges for consultants and students. Many consultants listed insufficient bandwidth and the relative difficulty of reading social cues online versus in-person as common barriers to successful sessions. Nonetheless, consultants also described the unintended benefits of tutoring online. The challenge of reading social cues described above led one consultant to be more vocal in “asking whether a concept made sense or if they would like me to rephrase” for clarity. Another consultant found that in an online environment, students “were encouraged to do more of the work on their own” rather than expecting the consultant to do the heavy lifting in a session. These responses suggest that consultants were able to locate potential shortcomings of in-person tutoring (consultants becoming too reliant on social cues and students expecting too much from consultants) after transitioning to online instruction.

The fact that our consultants were able to lead in a time of crisis and the fact that these consultants can reflect on this leadership in such valuable ways leads us to an important question: why were our peer consultants so prepared (and willing) to chart a new path forward and to exceed our expectations? We believe the answer lies, in part, in what called them to the peer consulting position in the first place: a sense of responsibility to their Elon peers; an acute understanding—based on their prior work with students—of how existing struggles with writing and learning might be

exacerbated by the isolation and disruption of working at home; and a commitment to the personalized, high-touch learning experience that Elon's residential campus affords. As students dispersed across the country, our consultants understood that they offered one of the few connections to campus outside of their faculty instructors. Just as important, as the feedback above shows, this was a mutually beneficial connection for students *and* consultants.

Applying what we learned from our consultants in the spring—such as their willingness to lead and their commitment to fellow students—will be crucial as we prepare for fall. While we as administrators may feel encouraged to rely even more heavily on the consultants who keep our offices running, it is also crucial that we recognize the additional burdens on those who will be tasked in the fall with enacting our plans in real-time while navigating a very different student experience.

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Learning in the Time of COVID-19: Providing Student Support from a (Social) Distance

By Shawn O'Neil

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The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) is a public, four-year, land-grant institution with approximately 20,000 students, roughly 5,800 of which live on campus. It is a minority-serving institution, with 67% of students identifying as female, 27% identifying as African American/Black, and 10% identifying as Hispanic/Latinx. UNCG was recently recognized as having closed the black/white achievement gap as well as being ranked #1 in the state for social mobility.

The Academic Achievement Center (AAC) is well-integrated into the success landscape at UNCG. We are part of the Division of Student Success, which was created in 2019 to bring together success initiatives across the institution. AAC support services include small-group Tutoring (appointment-based and drop-in), Supplemental Instruction, campus-wide and in-class workshops, and both individual and small-group Academic Skills support. Our tutoring program also has College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) certification at levels 1, 2, and 3. In spring 2020, we had approximately 90 tutors and 35 SI leaders, in addition to 5 professional staff and 5 graduate assistants.

We have a small staff office suite (cubicles for professional staff, tables, and desks for graduate assistants and student employees to use), and a small Learning Resource Lab for student use, and an 8-person meeting space. Because our space is limited, the majority of our sessions are facilitated in our main library (in the case of tutoring), reserved classroom space (SI), or other reserved spaces in department buildings. Small-group Academic Skills sessions are scheduled in our 8-person conference space in the Learning Resource Lab.

Before the state-mandated COVID-19 lockdown on Friday, March 13th, tutoring, and academic skills support were offered online by request, but we received very few requests for online support. Even with a large population of off-campus students, we found that most preferred coming to campus to study and seek support in the early evening rather than meet online. Additionally, our tutor training program had already created asynchronous online make-up assignments, available by supervisor approval if a tutor missed a training session. Per CRLA guidelines, tutors must complete a set number of Tutor-Trainer Led, Interactive, and Synchronous training sessions, and thus were limited in the number of asynchronous assignments they could complete per level.

Once the university announced the shift to emergency online instruction (the week students returned from Spring Break), students left campus and we were given a week to shift our services to 100% online. While a daunting task, our staff was eager to continue to assist students. We knew that, with some training, we would be able to help support

students during this unprecedented and challenging transition. This paper will discuss our challenges and successes as we implemented this shift to an online format.

Tutoring and Supplemental Instruction Services

The university gave us one week to decide the best mode of delivery for our services and to prepare our staff to meet with students remotely. After some quick research, we selected Google Hangouts as the platform to connect students with their tutors. Since many of our tutors had no experience, or very little experience, meeting with students online, we developed an updated training on how to conduct online tutoring. We provided training on Canvas on setting up and using Google Hangouts, including ways to promote psychological closeness despite the physical distance through the use of framing, audio, and visual imaging, etc. This training could be completed by tutors at their own pace and included a handout that tutors could reference as they were setting up and conducting their first few sessions. Supervisors also offered to do practice runs to make sure everyone was comfortable with the online mode of delivery before their first sessions with students.

We created a similar training for our SI leaders to use Zoom for their online sessions because Zoom allowed us to accommodate larger groups than Hangouts. Other than the platform, much of the online training was similar, and most of our staff adapted quickly to using Zoom and Google Hangouts. The tutors and leaders helped each other by

sharing strategies and doing practice sessions with each other. Tutors and leaders were as flexible as possible in scheduling sessions. A few students had trouble with an internet connection, and their tutors would call the students and conduct sessions via phone, and students also had the option to join Zoom via phone. Our tutors and leaders also helped their students adjust to online sessions by sharing tips and tricks. They worked through challenges and concerns their students had with online learning and connected them to other resources as needed.

A number of our student staff were both tutors and SI leaders, which allowed them to use both platforms. The feedback we received was that Zoom was more reliable and user-friendly, and offered more features than Hangouts. Students, leaders, and tutors liked how easy it was to screen share and use the whiteboard feature on Zoom. This feedback informed our decision to proceed with Zoom for both tutoring and SI for the summer and fall semesters. During our summer session, we offered Drop-In tutoring and we gave our student staff the option of Google Hangouts or Zoom. All but one of the tutors opted for Zoom.

In addition to developing the systems to meet our students' needs, we also wanted to ensure that our tutors, who had worked so hard toward CRLA certification up to that point, had a path to completion. Per CRLA guidelines, a limited number of training hours can be accrued asynchronously. For these trainings, we had materials on Canvas that tutors could read through, recordings of previous trainings, and other resources to review. After completing the

reading, they could then submit an assignment on Canvas about what they learned from the experience. Canvas would automatically track how long the tutors spent on each task, which we could record as training hours. However, since not all training hours could be accrued asynchronously, we had to create an online synchronous training option, too.

For trainings that needed to be completed synchronously, we created digital versions of our activities. We had tutors work together on Google Docs to create visual aids or complete tables and charts. For example, one of the activities involved completing a chart on asking effective questions during tutoring sessions. These interactive digital tools ensured that our tutors could continue to participate in training sessions and work collaboratively online. Tutors appreciated being able to see and talk with each other regularly. With the time crunch, having online asynchronous makeups was very helpful, but if we had more time, we would have liked to do more of the makeups synchronously. For fall 2020, tutor training will be offered synchronously using Zoom.

Another component of our certified training program is observing our tutors in authentic tutoring sessions and providing feedback using a standardized checklist as well as discussing a self-reflection form the tutor completes. Thankfully, our observation form was already online (on Qualtrics), so we only needed to worry about the logistics of scheduling. The easiest way to manage was to ask the tutor to send us a Google Calendar invitation to the Hangout session

of their choice. We could join the room with a camera and mic off, observe, and then meet via Zoom or Hangouts later to discuss the results.

While we found a way to mirror components of tutor and leader supervision (observations, meetings, trainings) in an online format, we ran into challenges. An immediate complication we ran into was student attendance. Many students stopped showing up to tutoring sessions and some did not respond to their tutor's emails. Our tutors were encouraged to be as flexible as possible with re-scheduling sessions but some got frustrated by the frequent absences and poor communication from their students. To remedy that problem, we gave tutors the option of using no-show sessions to do a different task. Some options we gave them included: create learning resources for their students, research tutoring programs at other institutions and reporting back ideas we could implement, research a study strategy they could share with their students, and create a handout, flier, or short video about our services that we could use in our email outreach to students or social media, etc. While these hours wouldn't count toward student contact hours, they were useful in helping minimize tutor frustration while also supplying information that we could use to improve our program.

Another issue we encountered was that a few tutors resigned after the shift to online services. Some felt overwhelmed with their classes now being all online whereas others had issues with internet access or were dealing with stress and depression related to COVID-19 and lockdown. We connected these tutors with resources on campus such as the

Counseling Center and our academic skills services to help them better balance their workload. We did our best to re-assign students to other tutors, which also helped remaining tutors make up time for lost hours due to no-shows. Despite a few resignations, we received positive feedback that the majority of our staff appreciated being able to keep working after moving online. They were able to still make money, and also they shared that the sense of normalcy and structure to their day was helpful, and they enjoyed being able to continue helping other students.

Lastly, it felt disconnected to not see our staff every day. Since our student staff couldn't drop by our office, we sent more email communication to remind them to reach out to students, keep them in the loop with program updates and to make sure they were doing okay. It has been a stressful semester for our student employees as well as the students we serve, so we regularly sent self-care resources to our tutors, encouraging them to use these themselves and also share with their students.

Academic Skills Services

Our goal for Academic Skills coaching is to engage students in the learning process and allow them to practice the skills they want to develop and improve. Our model for in-person sessions involves group participation and application of the skills being covered (i.e., time management, study techniques, etc.). For example, if the topic of the group session is note-taking, students have the opportunity to take notes as an

outline, a mindmap, or with the Cornell method during a mock lecture. In every session, students are encouraged to ask each other questions and share their experiences. We wanted to simulate the group dynamic and active involvement of our in-person group sessions when we moved them online.

We created templates in Google Docs and Google Sheets where students could still practice the skills we worked on during our sessions, as well as contribute to the discussion. Students completed digital weekly schedules, added their events and due dates to blank monthly calendars to practice reverse planning, and used a blank outline, Cornell, and mindmap templates to practice note-taking during mock lectures. We provided designated spots in a shared document for each student to type what they hoped to gain from the session, to answer reflection questions, and to share advice. This written method mitigated the chaos of internet lag or multiple people speaking at once, and it allowed everyone to see each other's responses and contributions.

Students responded positively to the structured engagement, where they were given the time and space to reflect on their answers, and everyone had the opportunity to read and respond to each other's answers-- whereas in person, one or two people might overwhelm the discussion, these groups had more equal participation.

Academic Skills services struggled with some of the same concerns and challenges that tutors had related to attendance; many students found their lives in upheaval due to the pandemic and didn't always make it to their online appointments on time or at all. Many sessions had to be

rescheduled, and some students decided to discontinue their sessions altogether.

Workshops

In a typical semester, we offer a variety of options for workshops-- we do an all-campus workshop series and we also accept workshop requests from faculty and student groups. At the time of the COVID shut-down, we had finished all but four of our all-campus workshops for the spring, with the remaining events focused on Test Taking and Test Preparation techniques. These four workshops were designed to follow a similar pattern to our Academic Skills sessions but for a larger audience. Thus, we were able to use a lot of the same resources and strategies in planning for moving these events online that we did for the small-group Academic Skills sessions. We even planned to use the same online templates to facilitate active participation, instead of becoming less-engaging online lectures.

Notifying campus about the change from in-person to online wasn't difficult, since our all-campus events were advertised on our university's events website-- we were able to log into the site and change the location to a link instead of a building. We could also email all the students who had RSVPed, and let them know that the workshop they had wanted to attend had shifted online. Though we had been using Google Hangouts for the small-group sessions, we chose Zoom as the platform for our online workshops, just as we did for Supplemental Instruction, because we felt it easily

accommodated larger groups of people, and allowed for more dynamic facilitation through the use of Breakout rooms, screen share with annotations, etc.

Despite planning and advertising these workshops in similar ways we would have during a typical semester, we didn't see much return on the time investment for the planning. Very few students attended, with three out of four all-campus events having no students at all. However, we did receive two requests from faculty to have us present content during their scheduled synchronous class time, and those sessions went well and proved that this method of workshop delivery could be effective.

Conclusion

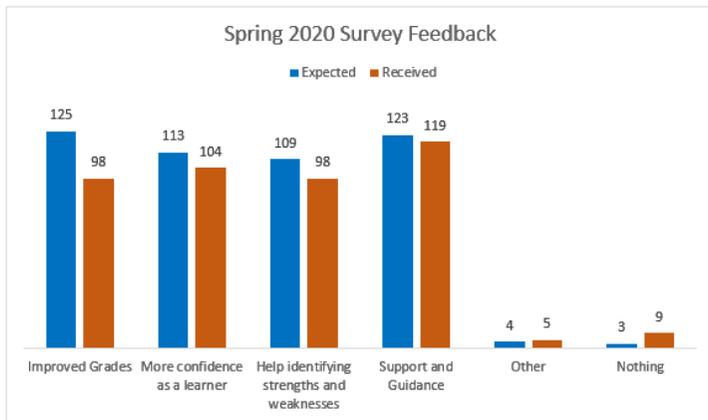
How did it go?

Not everything went as planned. Several tutors who worked with large numbers of students found themselves with unreliable internet access once they arrived home and had to stop tutoring (though one provided "text-based" tutoring using chat, rather than video). Some tutors who completed the training on providing services online still struggled with the modality, as well as helping their students understand how to use it. The whiteboard website we had directed them to promptly stopped working the day after class re-started (likely due to being overwhelmed by users). A couple of SI leaders shared the wrong Zoom links or set up their Zoom rooms in ways that made it more difficult for students to access (such as requiring a password or using a different link for each of their weekly sessions). And most of

all, our students were stressed and frustrated by the changes and were prone to giving up more quickly when presented with an extra step.

However, despite some setbacks, we had some major successes as well. Our tutors and leaders researched and designed some great student-focused resources and tools that can be shared with leaders, tutors, and students in the fall semester. Additionally, we were able to pivot to a drop-in model for summer tutoring which was more well-utilized than previous attempts to use a drop-in service had ever been. We also were able to think creatively and intentionally about what student support and learning look like online, prompting increased and improved relationships with other departments and faculty.

In our end-of-semester survey, which we sent out to any student who had requested AAC help this semester, we got valuable feedback, too. The students who continued with services appreciated having access to tutoring, SI, and academic skills throughout the shutdown. The majority of respondents received what they had expected to from using our services (see chart). Not only that, but 88% said they were satisfied or very satisfied with tutoring services, and 93% said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their Academic Skills support-- only slightly declined from last Spring's data where 91% were satisfied with Tutoring and 99% were satisfied with Academic Skills. Additionally, 78% of students said that using our services this semester had a direct effect on their grades this semester.



Where are we going from here?

Our institution will be going back to campus in fall 2020, with smaller class sizes and larger classrooms, to accommodate social distancing. Students and employees will be required to wear masks. However, about a third of our classes are transitioning to online, and almost another third are moving to a hybrid (or “hyflex”) model of instruction. Tutoring and Academic Skills support are going to be offered primarily online, to decrease student-to-student face-to-face interaction beyond the classroom. With this in mind, we are preparing for some changes to how we are operating:

- We are offering more “drop-in” sessions via Zoom-- both for Tutoring and Academic Skills, in addition to a smaller number of appointment-based sessions.
- We are collaborating with UNCG Online to design an interactive series of online training modules for Supplemental Instruction leaders, to help them learn more techniques and strategies for interacting with

large groups of students virtually while still maintaining the goals and requirements of the SI model.

- We are re-designing several of our online trainings for tutors to make them more interactive and deliberate, and we are also working on transitioning our in-person training activities to work synchronously via Zoom.
- We are hosting most of our workshops virtually.
- Our division is considering new tools for recordkeeping and scheduling, including TutorTrac so that we can move more quickly to help students in need.

The shift to online support tested the creativity and resourcefulness of both our professional and student staff. We figured out when to work together and when to divide-and-conquer to get things done quickly. As a result, we are more aware of each team member's skills and experiences. We have also developed a stronger communication with our campus partners and stakeholders to help educate, and collaborate with, campus on how we can help students achieve more success in their courses. Most importantly, despite the last-minute move to online, we were able to continue offering our students support. We were still there for our students and came up with a system to move all our various services online.

About the Authors



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How Are You? How Are Your Tutors: A Learning Center Coordinator's Pandemic Reflection

By Mike Ruwe

University of North Carolina Wilmington

I am stressed. Since March my wife and I are both working from home while caring for our two young daughters. It's a struggle to be a good employee and a good parent at the same time. But we feel lucky to have stable jobs. Many are not so fortunate.

In a few short weeks, the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) will welcome students back to campus and conduct the first day of classes. As Assistant Director of UNCW's University Learning Center (ULC), I am helping prepare our center for the start of the fall semester. If all goes as planned, I will be back on campus in early August.

While this return to my campus office would signal some semblance of normalcy, it feels precarious. In the article, "How One Student Chose a College during a Pandemic," Mande Heller Adler, the founder of International College Counselors, echoes this sentiment: "While most colleges that I know of have provided some sort of guidance for the fall, everyone knows that these plans could change on a dime" (Diaz, 2020). So, I am worried. And like summer pop-up rain clouds, these unbidden worries form in my mind. What will the campus be like when I return? Will it be safe? Will I get

infected? For the first time, my tutor training will be conducted online—how can I make it successful? What if our tutoring usage numbers continue to decrease? It's the uncertainty about everything—jobs, family, food, exercise—and on and on—that is numbing in its totality.

Students share the worry and weariness. The challenge for universities is to acknowledge this mental health challenge and to help students lessen their distress in order to focus on academics. Tutors are students first and tutors second. This dual role must be addressed by learning center coordinators. As I plan my fall 2020 tutor training schedule, my first order of business is adjusting my tutor training to an online format. My second, and more important concern, is the mental health of ULC tutors. So an important focus for my first tutor training meeting in August will be a self-reflection activity. This type of self-examination is invaluable for anyone facing a challenge and sharing concerns with a cohort can create community and possible solutions. With these points in mind, below is a draft of a tutor self-reflection activity for my first tutor meeting. The tutors will consider these questions before the meeting then we will discuss the answers during the meeting.

1. How are you? (Choose a one-word response.)
 - a. What is your biggest challenge right now?
 - b. How are your family and friends?
 - c. Describe some ways you are striving to cope with the pandemic in a healthy way.
2. As the fall 2020 starts, on a scale of 1 -10 (10 the highest) what is your level of anxiety?

3. Is your level of anxiety higher than a normal semester? Yes/No
4. If “yes” what are some ways to alleviate the anxiety?
5. How was your experience with online classes during the spring 2020 semester?
 - a. If you are taking online classes during the fall 2020 semester, how do you feel about this?
 - b. Imagine that a student is taking an online class for the first time. What online learning strategies would you suggest?
6. Consider your responses to the above questions. How might your answers influence how you interact with your tutees? *{I will share my answers to question one with tutors to get the discussion started}*
 - a. How are you? *Anxious*
 - b. What is your biggest challenge right now?
My young daughters are not attending their daycare, so I am struggling to find the time to be both a good parent and a good employee.
 - c. How are your family and friends? *OK, for which I feel fortunate. Two of my brothers have had frightening health issues. Neither has tested positive for COVID-19 and doing better.*
 - d. Describe some ways you are striving to cope with the pandemic in a healthy way. *I have very little free time, but I try to read a book at night, take my daughters on a walk to get exercise, and play my guitar when possible.*

After we discuss each tutor's answers, we will turn outward and consider how their interactions with the campus community will be different for the fall 2020 semester.

Julia Marcus, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Harvard, has this to say about interactions during the pandemic: "People will take risks, whether we like it or not...the best thing we can do is give them strategies to reduce harm in those situations. If we don't do that, we're missing an opportunity" (Lopez & Northrop, 2020). UNCW has done an admirable job in preparing for the return of faculty, staff, and students to campus: mask requirements, one-way exits/entrances into buildings, reduced classroom size, etc. It is helpful to know that a plan is in place. Part of this preparation includes offering more online classes than usual, and I suspect that between now and the start of the semester, an even greater percentage of classes will be moved online. Though not all UNCW classes will be online, the ULC has already decided that all fall 2020 tutoring will remain online (via Zoom) as it has since mid-March. The ULC worked hard to create a stable online tutoring system so that tutors and students alike could feel safe in their interactions. We want to reduce the possibility of harm.

After considering the larger health implications, my attention turns to the learning center. In the Open Forum for Learning Assistance Professional listserv, variations of the following statement have popped up recently: *Since we've moved our tutoring online, our attendance numbers have dropped significantly.* This is also true of the ULC student usage

numbers. And we are concerned the ULC numbers will be down for the fall semester as well. We *want* to assist students. This is our function and our joy. But what can we do if students do not participate? The ULC staff has debated many reasons for the decrease in students' interest in tutoring: Perhaps students are unaware that we offer online tutoring? Maybe students are unfamiliar with the online Zoom platform? Is the students' overall anxiety leading to fatigue?

Even though we do not know the exact reason for the decrease in student usage, there are some things we can control. The following are ideas the ULC is implementing.

1. Marketing: An increase in marketing which includes greater outreach to professors, extra ULC flyers in the "Orientation Bags" that new Freshman and transfer students will receive, and the creation of a new ULC promotional video.
2. "Peer Support" role: At the beginning of the spring 2020 semester, our Supplemental Instruction (SI) Coordinator received permission to create a new role in the UNCW Canvas learning management system. Professors could add an SI Leader to Canvas in a "Peer Support" role which would give the Leader access to class materials and discussions. The Leader could also email the class through Canvas. The Leader could not, however, get access to private information like grades. During the fall semester, the ULC Tutoring Services program will adopt this Peer

Support model in the hopes of reaching more students.

3. Online Learning Strategies: The ULC will create multiple pages of online learning strategies to help students new to online classes.

Hopefully, the above actions will help mitigate the decrease in student usage. That said, for students who do utilize the ULC, how do we help them thrive in these pandemic circumstances? Resiliency. Grit. Yes, these are recent academic buzz words. But that does not make these characteristics less important. In fact, in the face of the pandemic challenges, grit and resiliency are even more important: “So colleges will have to help students help themselves through this new wave of psychological distress...they’ll need a nuanced approach, offering resilience strategies while recognizing students’ grief” (Brown & Kafka, 2020). I believe that when a student makes an appointment with a ULC tutor, it is a unique opportunity for tutors to discuss with students not only *what* to study but also *how* to study. This “how” is included in the holistic approach the ULC takes to student learning. The ULC mission statement includes the following: “Our services support students as they develop independent learning strategies, personal responsibility, intellectual maturity, transferable skills, and a respect for diverse learning experiences” (UNCW, 2020). Intellectual maturity includes the idea of helping students develop resiliency. Being resilient includes adapting to online classes, focusing despite uncertainty, coping with anxiety, and learning from mistakes.

During this pandemic, the ability to cope with anxiety becomes especially important. Kelly Crace, Associate Vice President for Health and Wellness at the College of William & Mary, states, “People who flourish are not less afraid, worried, or upset about what’s going on around them...They have just worked at holding these emotions and thoughts in a healthy manner” (Brown & Kafka, 2020). So, tutors can help students develop these healthy academic habits by also discussing emotional intelligence: the ability to self-monitor emotions to maintain focus. The concept of emotional intelligence has been used in ULC tutor training for many years and will have a renewed focus this semester.

As I consider how the ULC may continue to assist students for the fall 2020 semester, the following scenario from the article, “The Pandemic’s Unique Toll on 2020 College Graduates” exemplifies a student’s anxiety about online classes: “I am concerned about staying on track for my classes – especially for my ArcGIS class which consumed a lot of my time and is very confusing. We no longer have labs for this class so getting help for it is so much harder now” (Brownlee, 2020). If this student signed up for a ULC tutoring session, the following is how I will train a ULC tutor to respond: “We can help you! You can utilize our STEM lab six days a week! Or if you want individual appointments, you could schedule two appointments per week. Or you can meet with an Academic Mentor twice a week. We can help you stay on track. We can talk about time management and staying resilient while you prepare for exams. We have strategies, handouts, suggestions,

practice opportunities, and lots more. And we can help you with your labs. We have been where you are. We are all in this pandemic situation together. We understand.”

We are in this pandemic situation together; however, it is uncharted territory. No one has attended a modern university during a pandemic. No one knows for sure the best way forward. Storms keep popping up. But we must strive for understanding. Angela Duckworth, a psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, considers how we might respond to this pandemic: “This is not going to be a footnote. This is going to be a chapter in the history books...and by finding purpose in one’s actions and meaning in one’s relationships, one day you’ll be telling your children and grandchildren about how you lived through history, and I want you to be proud of how you reacted to it, that you demonstrated character (Brown & Kafka, 2020).

And after writing this article, I feel less stressed. Hopefully, the training sessions I have with tutors will also make them less stressed. The worry will be there. But, there is a purpose in my actions: during a pandemic, I hope to make the tutoring experience for UNCW students as helpful as possible.

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Put Experiential Education in Your Survival Kit

By Rebecca Tedesco
Southwestern College

“How are you?” has become a heavier question in the Covid-19 era than it was before. For many of us in NCLCA and related organizations, similar formerly-simple-but-now-heavy-questions are showing up at work, too: *“How are you going to teach that?”* or *“How are you going to train your tutors?”*

The unsaid word at the end of each of these questions is “now,” meaning during a global pandemic, in which there are new constraints and a heightened sense of danger. So many new ideas, tools, and technologies abound that they can feel more like weights than life preservers at times, threatening to sink us.

The conclusion I have come to is that a magic potion, in the form of an app, or a silver bullet, in the form of some software, will not prove to be the key tools for our survival unto themselves. Tips and tricks, as they say, will not save learning assistance or higher education from collapse. To solve a human problem, we have to lean into our humanness; and this is why my go-to tool in the current crisis, and the one I have been suggesting to my colleagues, is experiential education.

To me, experiential education is as fundamentally ‘human’ as pedagogy can get. Take for example a tried-and-true adage we have in the experiential education community: **connection before content** (Block, 2009, p. 146). On a challenge course,

you cannot throw a group into their first event until they have begun to form a foundation of trust. The same principle is true in a classroom or learning center, yet as professors or program coordinators, we often jump into content without taking the time to build bonds between participants. Connecting learners could be as simple as having participants answer a check-in question (e.g. What is the name of a song that represents how you are feeling right now?) or as complex as having participants click through a virtual museum to choose a piece of art to discuss with teammates. Once participants are connected, they are primed to create knowledge together as they explore the content we want them to engage with. It is quintessentially human to want to feel connected to other people and that connectedness is a necessary ingredient for learning.

Let's take a step back. You might ask: What do you mean by experiential education? Here is a definition I wrote that synthesizes three of my heroes' definitions of experiential education (Cummings, 2019; Kolb, 2001; Stanchfield, 2014):

An approach to learning, distinct from cognitive and behavioral learning theories, in which knowledge is created through experience that involves participants physically, socially, intellectually, and emotionally. Effectively sequenced games or active, novel activities paired with meaningful reflection are critical parts of the curriculum.

A key phrase in this definition that comes from Stanchfield (2014), whose pedagogy is inspired by John Dewey, is

meaningful reflection; like *connection before content*, it is a signature element of experiential education that strikes me as fundamentally human and beneficial in our current situation. As literacy researchers Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) explain in their seminal book, *The Psychology of Written Composition*, “human beings are distinguished by their ability to acquire expertise—that is, to develop high levels of ability and knowledge of kinds that do not arise naturally out of everyday living but require sustained effort over long periods of time” (p. 3). In this passage, Bereiter and Scardamalia are complicating the notion that human learning is a naturalistic process; it is both naturalistic, they argue, and requires sustained, intentional effort on the part of the learner.

As an experiential educator, I would suggest that, to progress beyond purely naturalistic learning, facilitators must guide learners to devote energy to meaningful reflection. Much of what we do in experiential education involves (metaphorically) transporting participants to other worlds in which the rules of reality have been changed to create learning opportunities. For this approach to be effective, as Cummings (2019) states, “Experiential Programs also have built-in reflection time, whereby participants reflect on their experience and relate those experiences back to the real world.” Without this step, we are having fun playing with participants, but we are not intentionally facilitating learning. In my view, reflecting is fundamentally human, because, as Bereiter and Scardamalia write, humans are uniquely

equipped to learn over time through sustained effort, which includes continually reflecting on their experiences.

Connecting and reflecting are but two bedrock components of experiential education. There are many more and I encourage you, as I have encouraged hundreds of my colleagues this summer through online workshops and guided practice playgroups, to explore the pedagogy of this field. I think you will find, as I have, that experiential education becomes a go-to tool in your survival kit for the pandemic, and beyond.

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“I looked for the manual...it just wasn’t there.”

Lessons Learned in a Pandemic

By Brook S. Edwards
Tiffin University

I began my Learning Center career as a tutor in a traditional campus-based program in 1993. When I returned to that same institution many years later, I found a program that had changed very little from the traditional experience of learning center operations. Visits were collected on tally sheets, surveys were in paper forms, and appointments had to be scheduled in person. While these methods worked very well in a small liberal arts institution based entirely on-ground, changes were needed. Students were evolving in ways that would mean declining usage of traditional methods and an increased reliance on technology.

Over four years, the Learning Center was redesigned to include more technology-based systems. However, the use of technology alone did not ensure success. Online tutoring was attempted and failed, in large part because it was not supported by some key stakeholders. The use of web-based technology was not adopted, despite the need to provide outreach to a satellite campus in another city. Resources for more robust platforms didn’t exist. Faculty and some college personnel argued that these innovations wouldn’t work or worse, were methods for “outsourcing” student jobs. Resistance blocked change from a variety of directions, so we

worked with the resource provided and adapted were possible.

Fast forward to January of this year. As the Center administrator and, with the start of the term, the only professional staff member, I watched as the story of the coronavirus began to emerge. Perhaps naively I looked upon the growing pandemic as tragic, but something that wasn't likely to impact me on the edge of the U.S. Midwest. It was business as usual.

As the term commenced, I was contacted by another institution about a new employment opportunity. While I had no plans to leave my current position, my wife and I agreed we should look at the offer. For the next month and a half, my focus alternated between managing the on-going operations at my current institution and holding discussions with a potential new employer. Even as the pandemic grew, I still felt relatively secure in the idea that we would continue to operate as we had always done. This was an institution that rarely closed to hazardous weather and seemed an unlikely candidate for closing to a virus. The idea that anything would close to a public health crisis seemed more like the situations you would see play out in movies, not in real life. Amidst this, I accepted the new position with a plan to begin that summer. That was the last week of February and what I refer to as the last week of normal.

In the first week of March, we began Spring Break. By mid-week, leadership determined that we would not be returning to campus. The governor had ordered all schools to close their physical campuses and migrate to remote status. Public

schools were closed and colleges and universities, both public and private, faced for the first time an identity crisis like none other. The hope was that this would change. Surely we would be closed for a week, maybe two, and the governor would reconsider. The following week we were directed to move all courses, programs, and work online. For a school that focused on hands-on learning and in-person, traditional education we were pushed into new territory like many other institutions across the country.

My challenge: develop a full online support program that included Supplemental Instruction, Tutoring, and similar supports in two weeks with no additional resources, platforms, or materials at my disposal. Budgets were tight and prior technological initiatives had not been successful. While on-ground services had increased in usage from 14% of the student population to 43% during my tenure, none of the services were set up for online delivery. Adding to this, only about 35-40% of the courses being offered by the institution had an online component or supplemental companion in the learning management system. The learning curve was steep for many.

The advantage: I had excellent tutors and a tutoring assistant who stepped up when it was needed most. Working with my tutoring assistant, a student, and Education major, we developed a system using email, Google forms, Zoom, and phone calls – the tools at our disposal which would incur no added cost to an institution now struggling to this challenge and potential economic uncertainty. We created spreadsheets

to track appointments, requests for service, and other Center data. Concerned about whether our tutors would be willing or able to handle the new environment, I called each one of them individually and went over what was planned. While I had faith in them, part of me was waiting for the inevitable “No, that’s not what we signed up for.”

Every member of the Center staff, all eight student workers, stepped up to the plate. Undaunted by the pandemic, they were ready and willing to serve their fellow students and excited for the new challenge. Additional student leaders who worked with SI came on board as well. Through phone calls, meetings, and probably one of the shortest training sessions I have ever held, we pulled together a program to meet the needs of our new online learning community.

By the end of the term, I counted our work a success. Some look at it and ask how. Citing a decline in the overall numbers of students who chose to use the services (we had an estimated decline of over 50%) and knowing that some students simply withdrew rather than stay in an online format, some looked at what was created and suggested it wasn’t successful. From my perspective, despite the numbers, I consider it a great success. New paths are not easily forged, but learning experiences from those trials provide invaluable lessons.

First, I learned about innovation when necessity dictates you must change. We had no choice. Did we handle it perfectly? I can’t answer that. Others can judge but I can say with confidence we ensured that our students had the opportunity to be served and provided a series of methods

and tools that would support them. While I had considered myself innovative and had tried many ideas from the various state and national conferences I have attended, nothing will compare to having to innovate under pressure. There was no study, no presentation, and certainly no data as to what you do in a pandemic. As a colleague of mine stated in referring to how we do things in this crisis, “I looked for the manual...it just wasn’t there.”

In addition to innovation, I learned about resilience and the importance of having a great team. The tutors and consultants I worked with were ready. They helped build a system that was functional and served our students. When the task was set before them, not one of them balked. They pointed out flaws, highlighted what worked well, and helped me adapt the system. When there were issues or questions, they worked with one another, sometimes on their own time. By the end of the term, I had to remind them, sometimes more than once, to remember to turn in their timesheets. Some simply didn’t. When I asked one of them why, her response was “I figured I was home, quarantined, and had nothing else to do. Someone needed my help. And, well, it helped me to help them. I needed it perhaps more than they did.” I had a whole team of individuals like her.

The final lesson for me was that we have to be ready. While we can’t plan for every situation, we must think beyond the “traditional” and to the “innovative.” If we hire good people, in my case the best team of student workers you could ask for, you can face the challenges that lie ahead. They will surprise

you and help you develop programming and resources that you might not have thought possible. Let them imagine the possibilities. Let them hone their creativity. If you do these things, the possibilities can be endless.

When the term ended, I wasn't able to participate in graduation; it had been postponed, then canceled. I didn't get to thank my staff in person or, with the help of my wife, provide the home-cooked "thank you" dinner for the graduating seniors who worked for my department that we had hoped to continue as a Center tradition. The pandemic took these things, but it also gave me a sense of what I have to do going forward. I have to be prepared, I have to hire good people, but most of all, I have to be prepared to innovate.

As I continue my career at a new institution this fall, I will carry with me the many lessons learned out of necessity, the drive for innovation to be better prepared the next time, and the appreciation for what we can all build if we support each other in the process.

About the Author



Brook Edwards began as a tutor in 1993. Since that time, he has served as a tutor, coordinator, tutoring administrator and instructor at various institutions in Ohio. He currently serves as the Director of University Academic Support at Tiffin, University in Ohio.

ARChiving the Pandemic: How We Made the Most of the COVID-19 Moment

By Debbie Hughes, Ph.D., M.S.W.

Kimberly Bethea, Ph.D.

Duke University

Leaving Campus

The last time the team from the Academic Resource Center (ARC) at Duke University met in person was Friday, 13 March 2020. We did not know at the time that it would be months before we returned to our offices, maybe longer. Luckily, we were ready. Just the week before we worked from home while our offices got a fresh coat of paint. As a result, every one of us had some familiarity with the university's preferred online communication platforms and knew how to access our shared computer filing systems. On that last "normal" day at work, we packed up items in our offices that felt like necessities and readied ourselves to work remotely for the foreseeable future.

Over the next week, we met daily to confirm that everyone's technology functioned properly and to receive word on the ever-changing conditions that obliged us to stay off-campus. We had to act fast: What could we do to help our students adjust to learning remotely? How could we modify our services, which depended so much on personal interactions, to the confines of our laptops? Could we anticipate students' needs and deliver solutions before they become critical?

In the immediate wake of our move to remote support and over the past four months, the team at the Academic Resource Center proved to ourselves and other partners on campus that we had the energy, creativity, and resilience to weather a crisis of historic proportions. But how did it impact us as service providers, colleagues, and members of a disrupted community? To answer these questions, we asked our team for their insights. Here is what they told us.

Working with Each Other

COVID-19 and the necessary steps taken to curtail its spread had a significant impact on how we function as a team. The loss of our ability to pick up casual conversations and drop-in on each other was lamented by several staff members, especially because these were important ways for us to build relationships and learn from one another. This loss was especially felt by staff members who are newer to the team. Still, many also celebrated a heightened sense of purpose, energy, and commitment to a shared goal. As one colleague noted, “Especially in the beginning, I think we did a great job of coming together and keeping pace with the changes as they occurred. We were energetic and innovative in a way we have not been in the past. I think we have grown more respectful of each other’s talents and abilities because we could see them on display during the height of the crisis.”

To mitigate this loss of connection, the ARC’s Self-Care committee organized several interactions designed to bring levity and stress relief to our workday. They initiated fun themes for staff meetings (“pajama day”, “bring your ‘pet’ to work day”, “Zoom background day” and “favorite mug show

and tell”), ran a frequent Kahoot! trivia competition, and facilitated virtual yoga sessions. They also coordinated other gatherings such as reading circles, crochet lessons, and gardening discussion groups. “I feel the pandemic has brought me closer to my colleagues,” one colleague told us. “Because we only see each other online, we had to be more creative with our interactions, which became more authentic. When asked how we are doing, the response given is accepted with care and followed up if the response is concerning.”

Against all expectations, working from home brought us together as a team. Nevertheless, everyone admitted to some degree of adjustment in making this transition. More than half of the staff had to create at-home workspaces. Some described having to migrate around apartments to find space where they could work without being disturbed or disturbing others who were also working remotely. Others highlighted the challenges of working with children in the home. Many noted that the regular 9 to 5 workday was difficult to maintain when students were living in time zones as far afield as Fairbanks, Alaska, or Beijing, China. Flexibility became a virtue to meet student needs and to preserve one’s energy. As one person noted, “Mental exhaustion became an issue with multiple meetings in a day so I needed to build in more downtime.” Fortunately, this need for flexibility and accommodation was met with support from administrators and university leaders.



IMAGE FROM THE ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER AT DUKE UNIVERSITY'S WEBSITE
LANDING PAGE

Working with Students

While we made our adjustments to working from home, so did our students. The Duke community was afforded a week's reprieve with the extension of Spring Break, but for many students, this meant returning home and trying to figure out what might come next. We knew that we had an important role to play in helping students process, adjust, and perform through the ever-changing landscape of remote education. As one colleague noted, "While I try to always afford grace to students (because I never know what they may be going through) it was even more imperative now, as it was new "college life" for them, and I wanted to be sure to support them as much as possible." When the students were ready to "return", the ARC team was prepared to help make sense of the chaos.

From the beginning, certain types of need became clear. Although many went home to secure living arrangements with access to high-speed internet and other student-friendly amenities, some students were not so fortunate. Many began to express concern that they would not be able to focus on their schoolwork while juggling the demands of reorientation

and cohabitation with family. This had an immediate impact on how we approached our work.

In the wake of social distancing policies, the focus of learning consultations and other student interactions shifted from typical study strategies to many of the same themes: scheduling from different time zones, coping with being home after a period of independence, and adjusting to the shifting terrain of the newly redesigned classroom. “Many students needed help with figuring out how to adapt their approaches to the online mode of instruction,” noted one learning consultant. “Courses were constantly changing and they were inundated with emails and constantly changing syllabi, assignments, and due dates which they needed help with. For some students, I became the academic help/adult they reached out to.” Other team members described the enhanced emotional load of talking students through the fatigue of constantly having to re-assess expectations, deal with the disappointment of foreclosed opportunities such as study abroad or internships, and fear about what could happen next in their college careers.

All of these considerations led to great innovation at the ARC through spring and summer 2020. We organized quickly but intentionally to modify our services to suit our students’ new realities. We introduced many online engagement opportunities for students who might be looking for connections or brief encounters to discuss the transition from in-class to online learning. Towards this end, we introduced a peer matching program (Study Connect) to help students find other study partners in a large lecture or multi-section

courses. We made several videos to ensure quick and easy instruction on transitional learning issues, modified test preparation workshops for online delivery and shifted our focus on learning to emphasize how to do it effectively online.

Collectively, the ARC team took on the task of learning new software, platforms, and technologies to teach students how to use them. The ARC's affiliated Testing Center team felt the demand for rapid reorganization most acutely. Introduced to the full Duke community in January 2020, the Testing Center had only just developed its policies for regular operations when the call to leave campus came. Suddenly, all the best-laid plans were inadequate for requirements. The brick and mortar Testing Center, designed as a secure and welcome environment to accommodate students, was no longer accessible to anyone. "As a result of the pandemic, [we] saw a drastic drop in appointments. Instructors were encouraged to find alternative assessments instead of giving exams," the Testing Center's manager reported. "We needed to transform in-person proctoring and monitoring of students while they tested to a completely remote method." In other words, they had to draft a whole new playbook for meeting student need as quickly as possible. The whole ARC team's capacity to stretch our capabilities and demonstrate resilience in the face of rapid change enhanced our empathic response to student needs and thereby further improved the delivery of services.

Returning to Campus

Perhaps it is too soon to tell when and how the ARC team will return to campus. As of July 2020, COVID-19 infections continue to rise at an alarming rate in the state of

North Carolina. Despite a well-managed social distancing campaign in our home community of Durham County, infection rates are increasing. Consequently, the university is carefully monitoring the next steps and examining the utility of bringing all members of staff back to campus. The good news is that the work the ARC team did in spring and over the summer has ensured that we are well-positioned to maintain high-quality services remotely. While everyone is hopeful for a “return to normal”, we remain enthusiastic about our ability to meet students where they are and promote the best learning outcomes for our undergraduate community.

About the Authors



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Writing the Pandemic Off

By Regina Mason

South Texas College's Nursing and Allied Health Campus

Tutoring and writing support challenges have always been present when looking to serve Career Technical Education (CTE) programs and fields that require hands-on skills application. The Centers for Learning Excellence (CLE) at South Texas College (STC) is located at six campuses. Each campus addresses the unique writing needs of its students based on faculty communication, student requests, and usage trends. As of spring 2019, the Nursing and Allied Health campus (NAH) was largely void of writing support for its medical programs. The goal of establishing a writing center in support of the CTE students was set in the fall of 2018, with a one-year timeline to launch. Innovations, seemingly impossible visions, and some good old-fashion elbow grease were to be expected when striving to build a comprehensive writing component; the pandemic, however, was not something that we could have anticipated, nor could we have imagined the positive role that it would have in the growth of our newly established writing center.

My work with healthcare Career Technical Education students began when I accepted the Coordinator of Campus CLE position at NAH. I had a background in English and still touted pedagogical jargon that had Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies written all over it. Outside of care maps,

clinical documentation, and an occasional reflective paragraph, writing was not integrated into the majority of NAH's courses. I found myself questioning my purpose at a medically focused campus and I struggled to orient myself, amidst a blur of brightly colored scrubs and program-specific acronyms. It would take months before my position would come into focus and for me to fully understand how my role as a leader would fit into the complexities of this intimidatingly fast-paced world.

Over the next four months, my office became a Lazy-Susan rotation of department chairs, instructors, and program assistants who came bearing ideas, outlines, and goals for student writing. My whiteboard started filling up with each department's needs. The Pharmacy Technology (PT) chair dreamed of her students being published in Pharmacology journals. The Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) program wanted nothing more than to ingrain strong, professional written, and spoken communication skills. The Associate's Degree in Nursing (ADN) program aspired to establish a Bachelor of Nursing Degree (BSN), which would require extensive writing support. Before I knew it, this growing albatross began breathing heavily upon my neck. I had to stop looking at the lack of writing at the NAH campus as a void and I needed to start viewing it as an opportunity to expand our tutoring center.

The day had come for me to resignedly write the title "NAH Writing Center" at the top of my whiteboard; I set out to build a new expansion to our existing tutoring services. My first task was to examine the needs of the programs and the

strengths of my writing team. Twenty-four healthcare-related tutors graced our center floor; only three of which were listed as Humanities. These brilliant, unwilling captives held degrees in Psychology, Sociology, and Early Childhood Development. I knew that my leadership and writing abilities would have to come across as calm and confident if I were to have any chance of successfully alleviating doubt from my reluctant writing tutors. I celebrated my newly found writing team and prepared to start developing a well-laid foundation. The first few weeks felt like we were tasked as being the only translators at the Tower of Babel. We spent the better part of a year collecting writing samples, doing research, reading, and developing writing resources. We relied heavily on the healthcare tutors to help us unpack medical terminology and to explain the intricacies of their healthcare programs. We had countless meetings with faculty and staff to wrap our minds around foreign formatting styles, structural abnormalities, and citation requirements. The NAH campus followed no writing conventions. The days of thesis statements, logical conclusions, and APA/MLA formats, void of instructor modifications, became fading memories.

We accepted writing as the awkward, ill-fitting friend that it had become and, within that acceptance, we slowly began mastering the nuances of medical writing. By fall 2019, the writing tracks were laid and our “I think I can” mindset had us moving towards a student-focused destination. Numbers steadily increased, as we documented milestones for fall. By January, spring 2020, our writing center was holding

workshops, supported our first BSN cohort, and mastering APA 7. Our rickety, little writing team had become a full-speed freight train. The students were on board for learning writing conventions and we started to feel like we could finally exhale. It would be only two short weeks before our entire writing center was completely derailed by the news of the pandemic.

As a worldwide, Coronavirus haze settled uneasily over the college; every department awaited word on how to proceed. Those of us who had on-campus access went in to gather resources, files, equipment, and office supplies. If it wasn't tagged or tied, we grabbed it. We had to metaphorically sit on our tutoring baggage to latch it shut before running for the safety of work-from-home. We equipped our tutors with laptops, headsets, cameras, Chromebooks, and a few words of encouragement before locking the center doors behind them. The college had officially closed. At that moment, we had to look past the irony of our Emergency Preparedness brochure and focus on what mattered most...our students. We had to find a way to deliver our services and continue providing support.

Our department was given five days in which to build and launch a comprehensive online tutoring shell. Our leadership team's collective knowledge, resilience, and determination contributed to the around the clock development of our virtual CLE. Various platforms were piloted, student access links were created, and a hodge-podge of forms and tracking sheets were added to OneDrive, all to organize the chaos. Each Coordinator was tasked with a content-specific project; I

joined the team in charge of writing. I had worked as an asynchronous writing tutor over the years, but the timing and technological components never seemed to be in place to attempt a writing model for asynchronous submissions at the CLE. This was my opportunity to help expand our writing services and take lead on a crucial project aimed at student success. Externally, the CLE worked closely with our library and automated system team to create a Formstack submission page and website links to our services; internally, we worked on best practices, procedures, and tracking tools for our writing component. The last step would be training existing staff on Blackboard, Zoom, new services, and all of the innovations that came in tow. I was taken aback by the willingness and unwavering dedication of our staff to move forward during these dark and uncertain times. While other departments were watching LinkedIn training, in between catastrophic news reports, our tutors were creating How-To videos, online resources, marketing messages, and finding ways to get the word out to students that we were available to assist.

Locating the students in this emerging online world would prove to be our next major challenge. Before the pandemic, the CLE was a popular venue for students studying and keeping up with the rigorous demands of their programs. Spring of 2019's door counter logged over 50,000 visitors entering our center. Our staff and study spaces were actively sought out by faculty and students. It was no surprise that the tutors found it a little bit jarring when our entire campus population seemed

to disappear overnight. The first few months would present a learning curve for students and tutors alike. Our tutoring numbers were recording a third of our pre-pandemic totals. The low tutoring productivity data and uncomfortable “new norm” were further impacted by college-wide budget cuts and lay-offs. Tutor morale and awkward online interactions, full of technical issues, and missed social cues, became topics of concern. Every day presented additional stressors and new tutoring hurdles that needed to be addressed. It was imperative that I remain positive during this time and that my team stay in motion. Safety had become an estranged concept and the family feel of our center was replaced with self-preservation; we were all coping the best that we could. There were days that my naturally social demeanor felt forced and poorly orchestrated. I had taken on the role of a hype-man, strategically creating projects, team building activities, and conversation starters that would recapture our group dynamic. It would take months before the familiarity and ease returned to our, now online, tutoring floor. If my team was having difficulties adjusting to these college-wide changes, I knew that the students must be experiencing uneasiness as well.

It is important to note that the Rio Grande Valley has some of the lowest connectivity rates to the internet in the nation, in addition to having one of the highest poverty rates in Texas. Students with no computers and limited to no access to the internet were being asked to navigate through multiple virtual shells, stay at home orders that limited access to public technology locations, and rapidly thrown together online

classes. It would be weeks before school buses with wireless internet access were placed in rural area parking lots so that students could log into their classes. In the first month of the college-wide closure, very few departments had reinstated their presence at the campus; finding someone to answer a phone, much less a question, appeared an impossible task. The college's drop rates were rising. Online instruction did not translate well when attempting to convey hands-on learning coursework or for the programs with specialized software. It quickly became evident that a one size fits all online approach was not a viable option for a large number of our students. Our tutoring center numbers were greatly impacted by these unavoidable realities. Tutoring had gotten lost in the translation and students were simply not utilizing our services. I started internalizing what this downturn would mean for the CLE and the college. Darkness had begun preying on my fatigue, as a nightly search for solutions and strategies invaded my sleep. A tiny, disconcerting light kept beckoning; it was just out of reach from my overdramatic account of these events... our asynchronous writing numbers were steadily rising.

Could it be that overwhelmed students, not wanting to navigate additional online interactions, had begun submitting essays to our online shell, instead of meeting with tutors in real-time to review essays? Something about the ease and non-committed interaction of asynchronous feedback was making the 24-48-hour turnaround time increasingly appealing to students with shifting schedules and familial obligations.

Based on submission logs, the majority of students were submitting writing after hours. By simply erasing the limits of “hours of operation,” we were able to help more students in need. Succumbing to the chaos, I had forgotten to examine what was going right. Our new writing component had become the pulling force to ease this catastrophic event. With finals approaching, asynchronous writing numbers started surpassing content-specific tutoring sessions and were dominating as our most used service. Familiar names mirrored single server usage reports and soon began running into duplicate submissions. It was undeniable, the students liked our new writing service and had begun using it for multiple assignments and a variety of their classes. As students from all six campuses continued benefiting from our new writing platform, it was finally time to reexamine the needs of the NAH students and continue moving forward with our expanding writing center.

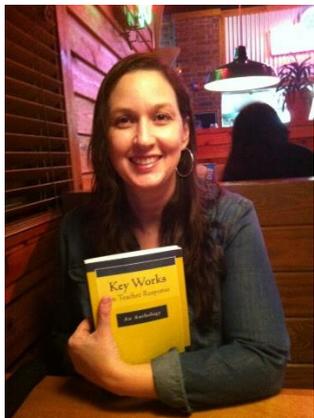
The anticipated hurdles of healthcare concentrated writing critiques online were quickly overcome by taking a collaborative approach to our tutor training. The writing team was asked to copy each other on essay comments. Throughout the week, tutors could review coworkers’ quality feedback and reflect on their tone and word choices. We would meet periodically to discuss high order concerns, patterns we saw emerging in student writing, and what we liked about each other’s responses. A comment bank, collecting common themes, general salutations, and reoccurring points of focus, began taking shape. Having a small team benefitted each of us in our development as writing tutors. Equally as important as

the collaboration between our writing team, was the relationships we were established with our students. Trust and balance were woven into our discursive practices, as we set out to make personal connections that would extend beyond quality, written comments. Students were encouraged to respond to tutors with additional questions or concerns about their submissions; these dialogues proved mutually beneficial. Students were being given tools to succeed, without being overwhelmed, and tutors regained their confidence in their ability to competently assist. The “we are in this together” sentiment had returned to our center by summer and our asynchronous writing services had proven instrumental in reconnecting us with our student population.

The pandemic has undeniably advanced the NAH Writing Center in ways that exceed the initial scope of our vision. The Centers for Learning Excellence is moving forward with institutionalizing the asynchronous writing service for 2020-2021. I am thankful that this new resource has allowed the CLE to start recovering from the devastating effects of the pandemic. The increasing online writing center numbers have saved tutoring jobs and are taking the main stage in budget discussions. The promising data has not only benefitted the staff, but has greatly contributed to the confidence and skills of our students as writers. I look forward to expanding our writing assistance further and anticipate innovations will emerge in light of recent Rio Grande Valley challenges. In the affectionate words of my tutors...Hurricane Hanna has

spoken and the CLE team will listen; we will continue fostering independent learning and student success.

About the Author



Regina Mason is the Coordinator of Campus Center for Learning Excellence at South Texas College’s Nursing and Allied Health Campus. She received a Master’s in Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies from UTPA in the Rio Grande Valley and currently has ten years of experience in student learning support services.

Compassionate Teaching during COVID-19: Key Approaches in a College Success Course

By Lauren Hensley
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Course Context

In this article, we (representing the instructional team for ESEPSY 1259: *Learning and Motivation Strategies for Success in College*) share our experiences with course communication, policies, and instruction in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. ESEPSY 1259 is the signature course of the Dennis Learning Center at The Ohio State University. It is offered as a three-credit, letter-graded elective through the Department of Educational Studies. Focused on developing effective strategies for the college context, the course covers topics such as self-regulation, motivation, time management, concentration, active learning (reading, note-taking, studying), memory, test-taking, and resilience.

In spring 2020, 430 undergraduates enrolled in 18 sections of this college success course. In the first week of March,

students presented their development projects to peers from across campus in eight sessions of the “College Success Showcase” event. We celebrated this milestone with our students and wished them a restful spring break. The next week, partway through spring break, we learned three important updates: the university would be transitioning to online instruction for the remainder of the semester, students would be required to move out of the residence halls (except in the case of an approved appeal), and the break would be extended by an additional week to aid in these processes. Because Ohio State was one of the first institutions in the Midwest to make such changes, the scope of these decisions came as a surprise to many. As we set out to adapt our classes to a new virtual format and processed the fact that we had met with our students for the last time in person that semester, we faced additional transitions including relocation, caring for family, and completing our coursework wholly online.

As we look back, we feel a sense of loss over the learning experiences we were not able to share with our students yet admire the resilience they displayed. Like many college success courses, ESEPSY 1259 is all about helping students develop confidence, motivation, and skill as learners. These goals were highlighted in a new way as we considered how to provide a quality online learning experience for students who had not chosen to take their courses physically separated from the structures and people that typically supported their learning. Reflecting on our teaching has helped us to be more mindful of how we accommodate the needs of diverse

learners, consider the salience of students' lives outside of the classroom, and balance fairness with compassion. Below, we share some of the key approaches in our teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, supported by quotes shared by students on an anonymous end-of-semester evaluation.

Key Approaches to Emergency Remote Teaching

Communicating with Timeliness and Consistency

Timely communication was vital so that students knew what to expect from the course and us. Soon after the university-wide changes were announced, we sent emails with course updates and reassurances that we would be supporting students throughout the process. As the semester resumed, we sent course announcement emails on specific days of the week to provide consistency. We sought to provide students with regular, detailed communication in a way that reduced uncertainty but did not become overwhelming. Our emails contained reminders and helpful details about assignments, information about university policies and resources to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic, and encouragement for students to reach out to us. We posted the same content in the announcements section of our Learning Management System (LMS) so that students could keep track of and refer back to this information as needed.

In their end-of-semester feedback, our students highlighted the following aspects of supportive communication:

- “He handled [the transition] very well, giving us updates on how the class would run very quickly, which calmed a lot of people’s stress.”
- “My instructor was great at communicating changes and stayed unbelievably organized for such a hectic time.”
- “She made goals very clear and communicated effectively with students. She even sent out weekly emails to keep everyone up to speed.”
- “I really appreciated her sending out a weekly email, which helped me still feel connected to class.”

Encouraging Connections among Students

Recognizing that the bonds created in college success courses are an important part of the experience, we developed synchronous and asynchronous opportunities to help students stay in contact with one another. For synchronous class sessions, we used the video-conferencing tool Zoom, which was part of Ohio State’s supported technology toolset. We had no idea what to expect with these virtual class sessions. Would they (or we) figure out the technology well enough to have a meaningful get-together? Would students even attend? We were pleasantly surprised to find that Zoom was a big hit with our students, who remarked on how it was nice to see and hear from their classmates. The learning curve for video conferencing was relatively flat; it may have helped that we had a practice Zoom meeting beforehand, in which we were able to try out screen sharing, polls, chat, and breakout rooms. All first- and second-year Ohio State students already had

university-provided iPads, which also promoted equity in terms of technology access.

Some of us met twice per week with our students on Zoom and some just once per week. Either way, keeping the meetings at our regularly scheduled class time, which students already had blocked off, seemed to help with attendance. In the Zoom meetings, we covered course content, highlighted stellar work that students had submitted, and led discussions. The breakout rooms were especially helpful for small-group discussions, and students liked having the time to catch up with one another and collaborate. (Even the occasional side chat was welcome, given the isolation that many students were experiencing when completing school from home.)

When considering the pandemic and teaching, it was beneficial to already have relationships formed with the students before having to go online. Students seemed motivated to attend the online class meetings – which we strived to keep informative yet upbeat – and they were comfortable sharing online. We wonder, though, if we would have more difficulty building a sense of class community had our students never met each other face-to-face before. When teaching the course online in the future, we will need to think carefully about how to encourage connection, warmth, and an environment where students feel motivated to share.

Our primary asynchronous approach to encouraging interactions with peers was through creating discussion boards on various topics. The online discussion assignments

were a mixture of course material and other relevant topics to help students; an example is a discussion post that covered strategies to help with stress reduction and mental health. As we will discuss more in the next section, these asynchronous opportunities enabled students to hear from one another without requiring same-time, same-place engagement.

The following feedback demonstrates how students appreciated virtual learning opportunities that provided a sense of connection:

- “I liked that [my instructor] had us do face-to-face [virtual class] meetings. ... It was nice to actually interact with my classmates.”
- “The in-person [video-based] Zooms were a change of pace from many of my other classes. It supported the atmosphere of the class as a comfortable learning environment.”
- “The learning activities were a fantastic touch to the class, truly a melting pot for ideas and inspiration.”
- “The discussion boards were a good idea because it helped us have some kind of contact with the other students.”

Providing Flexibility and Multiple Ways to Engage

As campus emptied, many students returned to living situations that were less stable than before. Whether they had returned home domestically or internationally, many students were now living in time zones that were notably different from when they had initially enrolled in the course. Some students were quarantined upon arriving in their home

countries and went two weeks without being able to access the LMS or respond to our emails. Others were deployed in the Ohio Guard, took on extra employment in order to help themselves and their families, or lived in households where high-speed Internet access was unavailable or unreliable. Given these contexts, we know it was important to be flexible with students in terms of both course policies and participation.

We provided flexibility in course policies in various ways. We generally relaxed our late penalties, allowed due dates to be flexible, and provided extra credit opportunities. We granted extensions for any student who sought them, and some of us allowed anything submitted by the last day of the class to receive either no late assignment deduction or a minimal one. To enhance fairness and acknowledge the work of students who were submitting on time, some of us provided extra credit to students who were on track with no late assignments.

We also provided flexibility in terms of how students could engage in the course, and several of us polled students to better understand their preferences and restrictions. We wanted to find a good mix of maintaining our class community and giving students the flexibility they needed. Our class was previously scheduled to meet twice per week. Some of us reduced the time burden on students by having just one required Zoom meeting per week along with an asynchronous method of engagement for the second day of the week, such as responding to a discussion board with a

creative product such as a concept map, short reflection, or writing exercise. For students who could not attend the synchronous Zoom class meetings, we uploaded our recorded lectures or created PowerPoints with recorded narration to accompany each slide. We provided a variety of options to make up for participation points: students could send us a written response to the content covered, respond to content on a discussion board, or complete a related activity. We found that flexibility and high expectations could exist side by side. The participation options utilized the same amount of time students would have normally spent engaging in class, to maintain a high level of learning without adding burden.

In the following feedback, students expressed how flexibility helped them feel supported:

- “She was very considerate of what we were going through and wanted to help by making this class as accommodating as possible.”
- “My instructor thoughtfully handled the COVID-19 pandemic with respect for all of our different situations. He also kept our opinions in mind when adjusting the format of our class after spring break.”
- “She provided us with short lecture videos and discussion board questions that could be completed in the time of our class period. She also gave us the option to attend a Zoom meeting during class time instead of doing the discussion once a week, which was also very nice.”
- “I liked that she was flexible in holding class and posting assignments that could be done instead. They

were helpful when I was having WiFi problems at my house.”

Expressing Care for Students

We wanted to be sure that students knew they mattered to us as individuals. We put the focus on student well-being first and directly expressed to students that *how* they were doing mattered more to us than *what* they were doing. We started our weekly emails with encouragement and appreciation for students’ efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19. To offer support, we shared online learning resources, tips for studying from home, and mental health resources regularly. We aimed to help students navigate not only our course but also their other newly online courses and the overall transition to distance learning. For example, we provided additional content on taking exams online and maintaining engagement in online courses. Some of us also included memes or motivational quotes as part of our communications to give students a moment of laughter or reassurance.

We reached out to students in different ways once classes resumed getting a sense of students’ transitions and well-being. We surveyed students’ abilities to engage in the course by polling their preferences for class meeting options and asking about any difficulty they might have meeting course requirements. Some of us conducted an initial Zoom meeting to check in with students (rather than simply to cover content). We provided open office hours via Zoom for students who wanted to touch base in a way that felt more

personal than email. We kept grades updated so students could make an informed decision about either taking advantage of the university's expanded Pass/No Pass option or working for a high letter grade that would factor into their GPA. When students submitted work, we provided detailed, personalized, and affirming feedback to help students feel heard and encourage their progress. Rather than waiting for students to contact us when they had difficulties, we reached out to individual students who appeared to be having trouble completing work and made arrangements with them as needed.

The following feedback demonstrates the types of caring actions that our students appreciated:

- “[My instructor] checked up on us and wanted to make sure we were doing well. He gave us tricks and tips to use to get through this time.”
- “My instructor always asked us how we were doing and what we were up to whenever we met on Zoom. Also, she always gave us personal [icebreaker] questions to answer to get to know us better.”
- “She did an amazing job being there for everyone who needed her during this whole COVID-19 situation.”
- “From the very beginning of this difficult time, he completely understood and recognized what challenges we would be/were facing and adjusted accordingly. I felt at any time I could reach out to him, whether for this class or another.”

Final Thoughts

Learning from and with other instructors was an important part of our experience. Our instructional team had weekly Zoom meetings at the end of each week, and we also had an optional Zoom meeting at the beginning of the week to join up with instructors of related courses. The meetings kept us in the loop with the goings-on at the Dennis Learning Center and Ohio State more broadly. Sharing ideas and concerns during our weekly meetings helped us adapt to the new format and design engaging, flexible curricular opportunities for our students. Beyond the informational purposes, seeing all of the friendly faces helped to keep us grounded during the initial transition to teaching online and staying at home.

Part of our desire to document our experience and reflections was to not forget what we have learned, particularly in terms of how important compassionate teaching is. Another part was to share these lessons learned with other learning center professionals. Whether or not you are part of a formal instructor community, we are all part of a broader community of those who seek to help college students learn, develop, and thrive. We hope what you have read in this article reinforces the great work you have already done and gives you inspiration for the future.

About the Authors

This collaboratively-authored article shares the experiences of the ESEPSY 1259 instructional team at The Ohio State University. The co-authors include full-time academic support professionals (Avila-Medina, Hensley) and doctoral students in Educational Psychology (Lee, Masonheimer, Nagpal, Perry), Higher Education and Student Affairs (Varzeas, Yu), and School Psychology (Gillespie).



Meeting the Students Where They Go: Creating Remote Tutoring at a Multi-Campus University

**By James W. H. Howard, Ph.D.
University of North Georgia**

This is the story of how the Tutoring Services team at the University of North Georgia created a remote tutoring program from scratch in less than two weeks.

The meeting started at 10:55 am on March 16th, 2020. I walked across my campus to the Continuing Education Building and entered the building. No students were around, and I could only hear a few staff working behind office doors. The math tutors were the first to arrive after me – Rachel Hastreiter was first, followed by Marianne Leidy, Rebecca Leidy, and Harry Childers. Carrie Wills and Susan Fifer, lab assistants, and Hieu Huynh, our di-rector, soon followed. We even had two student tutors show up, Liz and Mauricio. Greg Martin, the IT representative, arrived and began to set up the room to stream to other campuses, where other members of Tutoring Services were set up.

The purpose of this meeting was to demo Microsoft Teams as a possible tutoring platform. In addition to his in-person guests, Greg had an audience that spanned four of our five campuses. I remember feeling impatient with technology issues early in the session, as it took time to troubleshoot streaming issues and get everyone on the same platform. Yet,

when Greg entered the meat of the session and demonstrated how teams (groups), channels (chatrooms), and video calls could be set up, our group of tutors, assistants, and administrators began to ask questions. How could we set up a Team that students could join? How would we connect students to tutors in that Team? How would we ensure that people in the Team were students? How would we keep data equivalent to our in-person data collection? As the very model of growth mindset, we tried to figure out how to get this platform to work with our needs and the needs of our students.

At this point, we had ten days to implement a distance tutoring solution.

Let me roll the clock back a bit and discuss the background of this meeting where a remote tutoring platform was born.

First, Hieu, Carrie, Jonathan Barefield (an assistant director on the Oconee campus), and I had been discussing online and remote tutoring options for months. Our investigation was pragmatic – our smallest campus, Blue Ridge, did not have a large enough population to support peer tutoring, and we had trouble keeping part-time tutors in writing or math around. We also had some students who work remotely, like student teachers and online graduate students. So we wanted to bring our peer and professional tutors to these audiences. Tutoring Services had done remote tutoring in the past with videoconferencing tools or phone lines. Yet our team recognized that tutoring could be done better with a more robust platform. Through the fall of 2019, Carrie researched platforms like Zoom, GoBoard, and Blackboard Collaborate.

We attended a demo for Zoom where we played with the white-board and screen-sharing features. We debated tool usability, student accessibility, and price. We also discussed ways to differentiate ourselves from Smarthinking, an online tutoring service run by the folks in our distance education unit. Our team was uncertain of how to offer online tutoring that meets the needs of our students on each campus without being perceived as a competitor to Smarthinking. “More tutoring ought to lift all students” did not make for a clear pitch. No final answer was reached by the end of fall; instead, we decided to continue to pilot these tools through the spring. It was amid this piloting that our need for remote tutoring became more urgent.

Second, the need for moving all tutoring online came quickly. Our team could see the possible sea change about a week before it happened. As news reports observed an uptick in cases in the US and as countries in the EU shut down, I began to write documentation for shifting the Writing Center online. By Monday, March 9, I was sharing an email from my WCOonline support staff on how to shift WCOonline to online tutoring. At the biweekly Tutoring Services leadership meeting on March 10, shifting services online was a major topic of discussion, as the closure of Ohio State hit the news (<https://twitter.com/OhioState/status/1237222583482941440>). On March 11, one of my staff tu-tors decided not to attend the Association for the Coaching and Tutoring Profession (ACTP) conference in Atlanta. That day, I notified the Associate Chair of the English Department, Shan-non Gilstrap that I was

planning for the move to online tutoring already. On the morning of March 12, as rumors swirled about a possible closure of classes in the University System of Georgia, I scheduled a test session in WCOonline with Michelle Gilstrap, one of our professional tutors. The sequence of days left little time for preparation, let alone reflection. I recall doing all of these planning actions alongside the normal duties of supervising tutors, tutoring, and running the center.

On Thursday, March 12, I was in the last hour of my day in the Writing Center when an email came through announcing that students would be out of school next week and return after spring break on March 30 to an online-only format. Students present in the center were shocked – one non-traditional student kept asking how she'd be able to get work done if it had to be online. Another student asked what this meant for their paper deadlines next week. I did the best I could to reassure them that these details would be worked out, that the students should proactively communicate with their instructors, and look for further announcements. I productively shared my own concerns – that this will be hard, but we will spend the next couple of weeks bringing tutoring online, and we will do what we can to keep helping students through the spring. I was doing a lot of emotional labor in presenting an outward emotional state that did not entirely reflect my inner concerns. I presented methodical optimism. I felt uncertainty and dread.

By Friday, March 13, things moved faster. I shot off quick supportive missives volunteering to help faculty transition their classes more fully into our Learning Management

System (LMS), Desire2Learn (D2L). I tested online tutoring. Hieu, Jonathan, and I shared info about everything from what to do about Federal Work-Study and Institution-funded student workers to what next steps we would need to take to figure out next week. I contacted a student worker who did not think he had to work that day; I was sympathetic since some students had also chosen not to come in for their tutoring appointments. We decided, quickly, that most tutoring would be offline for the next two weeks, but that writing tutoring would already be available online for the next week under reduced hours in WOnline. My decision to keep writing tutoring going was informed by students being familiar with WOnline, being able to switch it online easily, and knowing that some writing opportunities were not going to stop just because classes did. We even created a list of staff training available online for tutors and support staff to go through while tutoring was unavailable. Customer service, time management, organization – the modules available through HR’s training portal, Skillport, were steeped in the language of business; anecdotally, staff gleaned useful lessons from them. Plus, they allowed us to show that student and professional staff were working while tutoring was offline. Bills need paying.

Over that weekend, Hieu enlisted Jonathan and me in writing contingency plans for all of the centers under Tutoring Services. In essence, we had to write about the very contingency we were now in. Without a go-to genre, I wrote this plan like a memo, headlining each possibility and

breaking down discrete steps into bullet points for easy readability. I pulled generously from the documentation for online tutoring I had already started to gather. I could describe what the remainder of the semester would look like for the Writing Cen-ter in Gainesville, and at least attempted to do the same thing for the Cumming and Blue Ridge campuses. Hieu took these drafts, thanked us, and put in grand amounts of his effort to make them consistent for our dean, Carol Adams, who would undoubtedly need to pre-sent these to someone higher up like the provost, Chaudron Gille, who in turn might have to present this to the president of UNG, Bonita Jacobs, who may have to summarize the summary of the summary for the system-level office. I had seldom been so aware of how far words carved out at the dinner table during a frantic weekend could travel.

Through the weekend, Hieu went back and forth with IT over what tutoring plat-form Tutoring Services might be able to use. We did not like the limitations of Blackboard Collaborate compared to Zoom, but the university did not have a subscription to Zoom at the time and IT did not want to approve its use. GoBoard was also possibly set aside by IT. Instead, IT wanted us to consider a platform already purchased by the university. In the long back-and-forth between Hieu and IT that weekend, word of a potential breakthrough came through Sunday evening: if Blackboard Collaborate would not do, and Skype was al-ready considered too simple, why not use Teams? Hieu set up the meeting with Greg for Monday morning, and I wrote down the time and place in my notebook.

So it was under all of this – the semester discussing online training, a couple of weeks of planning, a sudden switch to online, and the contingency plan planned during a contingency – that Tutoring Services staff came together with an IT representative who would demo one of the technologies that the school already had a subscription to. I was coming into that meeting feeling good about what I had done (kept writing tutoring going, kept communicating with faculty, written a large part of a contingency plan, given staff assignments for the week) and simultaneously anxious about what to do with all the other kinds of tutoring – math, physics, chemistry, accounting, and all the other subjects.

If previous weeks had been led by administrative staff beginning to plan for online instruction, the two weeks before returning to online instruction were when the staff of Tutoring Services came together to experiment, plan, and implement tutoring. A team of math and physics tutors, some students and some professional, began to create a math-based tutoring team. They worked through problems, like how to encourage students to join the Team and how to advertise tutor availability in the platform. In successive meetings, they would demo these features to other staff including the Tutoring Services leadership, who would ask questions and give feedback. So many questions were addressed through this iterative process, from how to keep assessment data consistent before and after moving online (we would keep spreadsheets that would record the students who visited and compile them weekly) to how to make sure students did not

wait long after replying to a tutor to be helped (we would have tutors “thumbs up” a student reply when the student was being helped, and we would have a moderator in each team who would direct students to available tutors if they waited more than a few minutes). The group was candid about the possible need for changes once Tutoring Services opened; at one point Harry suggested, “No plan survives contact with the enemy,” whereas I resisted the militaristic metaphor and substituted my NASA-inspired one, “Failure is not an option.” Both statements were messy, and the first one, not anything I would ever use officially (it being ambiguous outside the context of familiar col-leagues whether circumstances or students are the enemies), but they represented both how thorough we were trying to be and our acceptance that no plan would be perfect. Perfect would be the enemy of the good, but we owed it to students to be good enough.

In the spirit of good enough that we so often wish upon our students, we opened all of our services for tutoring on March 30th. Tutors eagerly posted their availability in Teams, and my writing consultants emailed me checking in for every shift. It was slow. Even before Hieu asked me for each week’s numbers, I knew that they would be down from the equivalent point last spring. We celebrated small bits of good news (Michelle Gilstrap is pulling very high numbers for writing tutoring) and pondered what we need to do to get these numbers up.

We had to market more and without the benefit of visiting classes physically or posting flyers everywhere. Hieu,

Jonathan, and I had communicated our changes via email to different stakeholders. For my part, I emailed students registered in WCOOnline and sent emails to different departments notifying them of the revised procedures for making appointments. I also corresponded with faculty who had questions about our new process. When these two approaches did not pan out, Hieu hit on a new strategy – asking departments permission for emailing classes directly by their CRN (course reference number), a unique identifier that would reach every student. So for math, English, and several other subjects, we did exactly this. Our numbers improved dramatically – 70% higher for the Writing Center between the first and fourth week, and 200% higher in math for the same time frame.

This kind of problem-solving continued, week-to-week, for big issues like marketing and small everyday issues. In learning to work through a new modality, individual tutors had to learn how to use OneNote, video chat, Microsoft Word, and other tools in their pedagogical situations. I had to juggle staff from synchronous to asynchronous tutoring, like when one consultant reported that their connection was not reliable enough to sustain video tutoring. Staff wrote many emails patiently guiding students through how to use our services. We painstakingly updated and revised our website and other sites to better inform students of how to access us. In more ways, than can be represented, from front desk staff and tutors to our director team, we practiced problem identification, analysis, ideation, and trial-and-error daily to

unwind all the kinks in our system. On the whole, I think we did well.

I'll wrap up this article here. The summer months, on the whole, have been more of the same. We have been working out the kinks of the online system while preparing for a fall semester where we will offer socially-distanced in-person tutoring. Uncertainties – like whether we will have all the Plexiglas we need, and how to navigate various university policies for remote work – have become well-known unknowns. Meanwhile, we have hired an additional assistant director, wished a campus coordinator a happy retirement, said farewell to our director (Hieu) as he heads off to medical school, and have oriented our former assistant director Jonathan Barefield to his new position as interim director. Time grows short, and my to-do list grows long.

We do not know what the fall semester will bring. That said, I am proud of the online tutoring platform Tutoring Services built in such a short period. Students needed it, and we built it for them. I am confident we will continue to build and improve our online tutoring alongside our in-person tutoring for years to come.

About the Author

James W. H. Howard is Assistant Director of Tutoring Services, a department of University College, at the University of North Georgia. He earned his Ph.D. in English from Emory University, where he tutored and mentored tutors in the Writing Center. James was also a Marion L. Brittain Postdoctoral Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology, where he taught first year composition and served as Assistant Director of the Naugle Communication Center.

Connecting During the COVID-19 Crisis: Fostering Team-Based Problem-Solving Across Campus Learning Centers

By **Christie Maier, M.Ed.**
Molly Reynolds, Ph.D.
University of Kentucky

When faced with a new and unique challenge one often looks to colleagues, friends, and mentors to help advise and guide decision making. We find it beneficial to hear from those who have expertise and experience and enjoy taking a team base problem-solving approach. COVID-19 was no exception; only this time expertise and experience were hard to come by. Nevertheless, when Transformative Learning at the University of Kentucky began its quick pivot to all virtual services, we intentionally brought a team of academic support professionals together to work through the novel challenge of providing services during a global pandemic.

At the University of Kentucky, Transformative Learning (TL) is the centralized learning center serving all undergraduate students through services such as peer tutoring, academic coaching, Supplemental Instruction, and developmental and co-requisite course work. However, many colleges and departments also offer their academic support such as tutoring. To increase communication and collaboration, TL established a Tutor Advisory Board (TAB) in 2017. This group of around 40 academic support staff and

faculty from across campus normally meet twice a semester to discuss topics such as traffic trends, professional development opportunities for student employees and members of the TAB, marketing, and promotional opportunities, and CRLA training. TAB also invites other campus members to present on various topics that are pertinent to tutoring and of interest to the TAB members. Before the TAB forming, Transformative Learning and the smaller tutoring centers residing in the colleges rarely worked together and lacked communication. Since the TAB's inception, relationships have flourished between TAB members and various campus-wide initiatives have been created including bi-annual campus-wide tutor training and Faculty Tutor Coordinators.

When the University of Kentucky (UK) made the official decision to move all instruction online, Transformative Learning quickly moved to convene the TAB for a special meeting to discuss remote options and continue to provide quality services to students. While TL had plans to pilot online tutoring during summer 2020, at this point in mid-March, there were no established virtual academic support services at UK. Shifting all services to be offered remotely would be quite a large undertaking at any time, but especially during a compressed timeline. TL knew that other members of TAB would be in a similar situation and felt a team-based problem-solving approach would lend itself to addressing this unique challenge.

At the March TAB meeting, members expressed a sense of relief at the opportunity to discuss each center's plan and share questions and concerns. The conversation was

intentionally structured to provide each member the opportunity to share their plans for shifting services virtual including hours of operation, what platform they were using, and the challenges they still faced. The simple process of sharing and discussing ideas enabled each member to improve and solidify their plans as well as allowed TAB to identify common challenges and concerns. Chief among these common concerns was supporting students through the transition; specifically training for tutors on the selected virtual platform (e.g. Zoom and Go Board) as well as communication to students about the shift in service offerings. To address these concerns, TL and several TAB members collaborated to offer multiple “online tutoring” training sessions which covered an orientation to the online tutoring platform as well as best practices in online tutoring. Additionally, TAB moved swiftly to update the free tutoring and coaching resources website so accurate information was easily accessible. TL and TAB also worked closely with the university’s Public Relations office in the creation of content for the new learn anywhere site, which included resources to aid students in best practices related to online learning and study tips.

Although we all anticipated there would be numerous bumps along the way in getting online services running, a team-based problem-solving approach allowed for improved communication and planning. In turn, all TAB members were able to benefit from sharing ideas and resources as well as collaborating on efforts to address common concerns. While

TAB did not meet again as a group, we continued the conversation through email; continuing to provide resources (e.g. webinars and articles), information (e.g. workstream updates from the university), and words of encouragement. As we came to the end of the spring 2020 term, the biggest hurdle had become getting students to access the services. All TAB members reported traffic was down for the spring semester.

While we made it through an unprecedented spring semester, an even bigger challenge is looming around the corner - returning to a residential campus in the fall. To plan for fall, reflect on spring, and strategize ways to get students to access services, the TAB decided to meet again in July. This decision showed true dedication to our services and the students we serve as numerous TAB members are faculty and are on nine-month contracts. The group decided to tackle larger issues, such as how to provide in-person services again when the university opens in August. Additionally, how can popular services such as large exam reviews happen online since space would be a hard commodity to come by in the fall and these sessions usually have hundreds of students attend? Further, board members discussed what to do if there are not enough tutors that feel comfortable tutoring in person when the university has committed to providing in-person services and full residential experience. Although not all issues are solved and the TAB has to make many decisions still to align with the health and environmental safety regulations set by the university, one thing stood out among all members: we are not alone. All TAB members seemed to feel comforted that

due to COVID-19, even the best-laid plans may be interrupted again in the fall due to the uncertainty of this pandemic. To prepare for these uncertain times, TAB will continue to meet and do so more regularly for the fall semester. We will provide open communication and share what is working in our centers and jump in to help when we face obstacles (e.g., understaffing, virtual training, and the like). John F. Kennedy said, “When written in Chinese, the word ‘crisis’ is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity.” The TAB is choosing to embrace this time as an opportunity to connect, communicate, and collaborate to better ourselves and our students.

About the Authors



Christie Maier is the Assistant Director for The Study at Transformative Learning, overseeing the administration of The Study’s Peer Tutoring Program as well as Supplemental Instruction. Christie joined the TL team in January 2015, starting as the Program Coordinator, and brought with her extensive experience in peer leadership and a passion for student success. Christie holds a B.S. in Human Development and Family Studies from Colorado State University and a M.Ed. in Student Affairs and Higher Education from the University of South Carolina.



Molly A. Reynolds is the Executive Director of Transformative Learning. Before serving as the Executive Director, Molly served as the Director of Presentation U, Faculty Fellows & Student Tutoring coordinator, and a Faculty lecturer in the Division of Instructional Communication and Research. In addition to her duties as the Director of Transformative Learning, Molly teaches part-time in Department of Communication. Molly completed her PhD in 2013 and has focused her teaching and research on interpersonal and instructional communication.

Pandemic Perspectives: Community, Uncertainty, and the Future of Tutoring

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Abstract

This article addresses the lived experiences of tutoring staff at a community and technical college during the COVID-19 pandemic. After contextualizing the institution and describing steps taken by the tutoring program to address the pandemic, the authors individually reflect on how the pandemic and the switch from in-person to online sessions have impacted tutoring, particularly concerning community, uncertainty (of students, tutors, and administrators), accessibility, and next steps.

Pandemic Perspectives: Community, Uncertainty and the Future of Tutoring

Representing a range of tutoring staff from Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC or Jefferson), we share here our individual and group experiences as tutors

during the pandemic, experiences deeply rooted in the institution that we call home.

Jefferson is an open admissions community and technical college in Louisville, KY, that awards associate degrees, technical diplomas, and certifications. Our largest campus is in downtown Louisville, but with all campuses considered, JCTC spans four different counties. Fall 2019 enrollment was 12,567, with 76% of our students attending school part-time (Jefferson Community and Technical College, personal communication, April 9, 2020). As tutors, we have the opportunity to work with a student body that some may consider nontraditional and that certainly is diverse: as of fall 2018, our students represented more than 80 countries and 40 languages. Further, 33% of Jefferson students were underrepresented minorities, 66% were from low-income households and 36% were 25 or older (Jefferson Community and Technical College, n.d.).

Tutoring is part of the Learning Commons, which also includes library services. The Learning Commons functions similarly to an academic department but can also be thought of as a place—multiple places, in fact, one location on each of the six campuses. Our peer, adjunct, faculty and librarian tutors are the primary source of academic support for all students and disciplines across the campuses, and the diverse needs of our students—many of whom are navigating college without the stability and resources of a “traditional” college attendee—make our services all the more essential.

Before March 2020, we offered in-person, drop-in tutoring (with a focus on the JCTC core curriculum) and asynchronous

online writing tutoring. Our tutoring program was focused on expanding our support for specialized classes, increasing our presence on the smaller campuses, and building a community that could respond to the individualized needs of our students.

In mid-March, our campuses, like many of yours, were closed due to the pandemic, and all services and instruction moved online. This change has presented obstacles for schools and students everywhere but is perhaps particularly challenging for schools like ours, where students are less likely to have the necessary resources for online education. For example, 9% of JCTC students lack a reliable computer and 8% of students lack a reliable internet connection (Jefferson Community and Technical College, personal communication, February 18, 2020). Further, some Jefferson students were uncomfortable with technology use – in fact, our in-person tutoring sessions have regularly involved helping students with basic computer skills, such as navigating Microsoft Word, Outlook, and Blackboard.

When our campuses closed, the tutoring program worked hard to move our services online as quickly as possible, and we designed and implemented online synchronous tutoring in 2.5 weeks. We built a structure for online tutoring that would meet the needs particular to our institution, researching best practices and coordinating logistics. We had begun using new data management software (TutorTrac) a few weeks before the closure, and just as tutors were growing used to it, we had to adjust our procedures for online tutoring. We would now

offer tutoring by appointment only, and appointments would be made through TutorTrac. Tutoring sessions would take place through Blackboard Collaborate. Tutors were then trained on the new procedures and practices.

We cannot emphasize enough how important teamwork was for developing synchronous online tutoring in such a short period. Everyone stepped up and helped as they could. Those already trained then trained others, and some helped with student handouts. Above all, we were patient with the changes, and with each other. This reflects our tutoring community, which was built as we worked together as coworkers but is particularly strong due to our shared interest in supporting our students.

A major concern throughout was that despite our detailed directions in multiple modalities, the new technology and multiple steps required to make and enter an appointment would discourage students from using our services. Further, we worried that the move to tutoring online, rather than at our more conspicuous campus locations, would make tutoring difficult to find. Unfortunately, that seems to have been the case. We spent significant amounts of time explaining and marketing our services, but the number of tutoring sessions dropped drastically. We were not surprised, but we were disheartened. The summer has been spent continuing to build and market our online services, but also waiting and wondering if we would have the opportunity to work with students and what the coming days would look like.

What follows are sections representing our perspectives. Ben and Megan discuss the centrality of community to

Jefferson and the Learning Commons, along with the difficulties in transferring (or rebuilding) that community online. Jessie reflects on the uncertainty faced by the tutoring staff, as well as the students. Finally, Elise, Sheree, and Maria look to the future.

The Community Form: Reproducing Relationships Remotely

Benjamin Poe, Tutoring Support Specialist

Our tutoring center quickly responded to the pandemic by transitioning to an online format, but the decreased participation from students illustrates the importance of the supportive community that we provide. At JCTC, I have been a student, tutor, and most recently, a front-desk worker who pairs students with tutoring peers and helps them navigate the college's resources. Our college is profoundly diverse and welcomes a significant population of immigrant, low-income, and first-generation college attendees. Thus, the staff at our tutoring center—librarians, course instructors, and peer tutors—offer their academic expertise to assist students with their courses, but what can be more important is that they offer students an opportunity to make a connection with someone who supports them. Every day I saw students come for tutoring, not necessarily for assistance on their courses, but to be in an environment that supported their goals—sometimes finding for the first time the community they needed to succeed. Therefore, the campus's closing has taught me that the most important resource our tutoring center offers is its community, and I worry that much of the help that our

students need to succeed is not compatible with online tutoring.

Before the pandemic, I knew that the community we offered was important, but I did not worry about students' ability to succeed: I knew they were in a space that would give them the support to achieve their goals on their own.

However, not all of our students have a similar environment outside of school. It was common for us to work with students whose families were not comfortable with them pursuing an education, or whose abrupt flee from their former homes in other countries meant that their access to technology and the ability to study in a stable location were not always guaranteed. The environment that we created was not only a place for students to receive extra help on topics difficult to understand but also a safe, supportive community that simply gave them space away from the other challenges they were going through. Often tutees understood the material they were working on, but our extra support gave them the confidence to turn the assignment in. They came wanting to hear someone tell them their work is important, that their goals are important, and that they are capable of success.

Can we capture that intersubjective connection online? Can the confidence you receive from knowing that someone else respects you be transmitted through a screen-to-screen interaction? Like Megan below, I worry that a part of the relation is lost and that the internet is not as accessible a place as we wish it was.

Lost Connections

Megan Washburn, Learning Commons Administrative Assistant

I was finishing up my workday as the administrative assistant for the Learning Commons when I heard the notification email on my phone. That email was the last email I read from my office's physical location as it informed all the staff remaining on campus that it was the last day we would be on campus until further notice. COVID-19 had already slimmed our buildings down to essential employees with no students permitted on campus. This was the first day of indefinite uncertainty for me.

After that day, things initially went by quickly as we rushed to create an online tutoring service to provide to our students. Through tremendous teamwork motivated by the desire to stay connected with students, we established an online tutoring service from scratch. We teamed up in both creating the service and training one another on how to use new methods and programs to ensure that we could deliver tutoring to students in an effective manner.

Online tutoring is very different from how we provide in-person tutoring to students. New barriers developed with the online method for tutors, administrators, and students. There were many areas of concern, from student computer access to delivering information about the new online tutoring service to students. Not only did we have to learn to troubleshoot issues such as video and mic malfunctions, but we also had to learn to troubleshoot issues remotely with students so that the

tutoring sessions could be carried out. We did this by trial and error, essentially practicing amongst ourselves and communicating issues we came across and ideas for solving them. As a team, we meet regularly to continue to improve the current online services we provide. Even our web page has transformed as we have made ease of access a priority, hoping to make services visible and clear for students.

Once completed, things seemed to come to a halt with the services being available virtually and without the presence of students using the services. We grew concerned about the loss of connection with students. At Jefferson Community and Technical College, we provide a community to our students that we feel we have lost as the pandemic has forced us to close our physical doors. As a student myself, I have a profound understanding of the unique environment provided by the Learning Commons. In a single building, students come in to study, gain computer access, find a book to read, get help with their classes and coursework, or even to rest and decompress. It is proving to be almost impossible for us to provide that same environment to students in a virtual state.

I have spent the last four years working either with students directly or with staff to assist them in providing services to our students. It's a very unsettling feeling not being able to take students to the stacks to find a book they need, answer their questions in person or address their concerns, or direct them to in-person services to assist them in their success. Assisting students virtually does not have the same feel as directly assisting them and watching them walk away with their needs met.

While we try to smile and stay positive, there is a cloud hovering over each of us. We feel we have lost the connection with our students that we strive to provide. Students can still receive tutoring and gain online access to materials and resources. But one thing that we have not been able to provide is the comfort of the Jefferson community. Students know many of us on a first-name basis, they have grown comfortable coming to us with their struggles and concerns. We miss those interactions and every day the uncertainty remains.

The current circumstance has proven to me that we are a team of people that deeply care about students and one another. While calling these circumstances the “new normal,” I am struggling with the disconnect that has come along with this. When talking to team members, I can feel that we are together in that same struggle. We all share the same concern about the success of our students and not being able to assist them in the same way we had grown accustomed to. We all seem to have the same questions: where are our students and how are they coping? I am proud to be a part of a team that genuinely cares about the success of students, and together we miss the space we have created for students that reflects that concern. COVID-19 has changed how we interact with our students and I can only hope that we can virtually build a similar environment that provides the same community feel.

Embracing Uncertainty

Jessica S. B. Newman, Director of Tutoring Services

Tutoring sessions have always contained an element of uncertainty that goes unacknowledged or unappreciated. This pandemic has brought an extreme version of uncertainty to tutoring and to our everyday lives, an uncertainty in how to behave, in how safe we should feel, and how much we should panic. Uncertainty in what the next week will bring, and, for some, in whether we are sick or asymptomatic or untouched by the virus, though touched still by everything else. This not knowing is painful, even dangerous, but it is also a reminder that uncertainty—at more moderate levels—is not just present in tutoring sessions but also integral to them.

Uncertainty was a recurring topic in a tutor check-in meeting this past June. In particular, tutoring staff faces uncertainty about the number of students we work with. There has always been a level of uncertainty with tutoring traffic—particularly on Jefferson’s smaller campuses—but it has now compounded. With the pandemic, students face more responsibilities than ever, and some students are perhaps sick, others struggling with the new technology for online courses and online tutoring. We went from frequent sessions in early March to not knowing whether a tutor would meet with anyone at all that day or even that week. We are distanced from our regulars and the new students we would otherwise meet. We do not know where these students are or why they are not here, if they are okay and when—if ever—we will meet with them again.

And, like tutors, students face an unknown. When they schedule virtual appointments, they are taking a chance on someone who they cannot yet see or hear, who cannot ease the students' way into a session by easing their fears. Students are less likely to schedule and attend a tutoring appointment when tutoring is online-only, when they can no longer pass through our tutoring centers but instead must virtually seek us out. Mediated by technology, tutoring traffic has become traffic in the internet sense of the word: the flow of data rather than people.

There is uncertainty, too, from my perspective as an administrator, an uncertainty which then filters down to the tutors and students. How will tutoring operate in the future, and will change be required in a matter of months or a matter of weeks or days? Will campuses reopen, and what would this mean for tutoring? How can we plan for the unknown?

This version of uncertainty is extreme, but it also serves as a reminder that uncertainty is essential to tutoring. As learning assistance professionals, we must accept uncertainty to best learn about and help the other person. Rather than make assumptions about the tutee, the assignment, the tutoring session itself, we must be open to the unknown and to use that uncertainty to meet each student where they are rather than where we expect them to be. To be open to this lack of knowledge, we must catch our assumptions as we make them and decide in real time whether they are appropriate and useful or whether they are knee-jerk reactions that do not apply to the current situation.

Questions can serve as the opposite of assumptions. By asking questions in order to listen to the answers, we acknowledge that we do not know. As tutors, we must ask questions to the students and ourselves. As administrators, we must ask about student and tutor needs.

And we must listen to the responses. In her book about the importance of listening, Lisbeth Lipari (2014) argued that ethical communication and action require us to move past the assumption that we understand something. This “opens the doorway to the ethical relation by inspiring (or frustrating) us to listen more closely to others, to inquire more deeply into their differences, and to question our own already well-formed understandings of the world” (Lipari, 2014, p. 8). Asking and listening helps us build awareness of our understanding and lack thereof, facilitating a move past preconceptions so that we can help the person rather than our assumed idea of the person.

Uncertainty is a reminder that we are working with people, not a homogenous student body, and that we need to be sensitive to students as individuals. The significance of this is more salient than ever. We must be sensitive to the causes forwarded by the Black Lives Matter movement, causes that have always been crucial and urgent but are now deservedly in the spotlight for those who have had the luxury of keeping them in the background. Further, we must work to be aware of often invisible assumptions, such as the white, male, middle-class, heteronormative student or white, male, middle-class, heteronormative tutor. And we should be sensitive to students’ uncertainty, uncertainty about how to use

technology, about what school looks like for them right now and what it will look like next semester, about their health, their jobs, and their future. The uncertainty that we feel as tutors is a reminder not to make assumptions about what students might feel but rather to acknowledge that we all have different feelings, different experiences.

The thing about uncertainty is that it's hard, particularly, as in the case of the pandemic, when we feel at the whim of forces beyond our control. Lipari (2014) argued that "there is great strength in not understanding—in giving up our convictions and certainties to let understanding evolve" (p. 139). Accepting this difficulty, building this strength, is a major part of what it means to be a tutor.

Connectivity during Uncertain Times

Elise Woods, Assistant Tutoring Coordinator & Adjunct English Instructor

Before COVID-19, throngs of students would flock to our tutoring center, which is part of the Learning Commons, for help with essays and assignments. In addition to the spot being utilized as a study space, it was also a popular destination for student hangouts. The Learning Commons was a welcoming and thriving place. Lightbulb moments during tutoring sessions could be seen and laughter among happy students could be heard. Who would have suspected that things could change so drastically?

Fast forward to mid-March 2020. Courses transitioned from in-person classes to online. People were no longer allowed to

work on campus. The only online tutoring measure in place was asynchronous tutoring for English papers.

During this time of online course transition, I honestly was not sure whether tutoring would operate for the second half of the semester. The abrupt halt to our work norm was unsettling for everyone involved.

Fortunately, despite my concerns, a solution was developed in the form of synchronous tutoring. The system operates in real time. It allows for students to gain the help they need in an online platform, where tutors and tutees can speak with each other and exchange work. It is a useful method to carry on tutoring outside of campus.

While the pandemic experience has been scary, difficult, and uncertain, I have been impressed with our tutoring response. During this time of crisis, our tutoring center figured out a solution to benefit both tutor and tutee alike. Though the demand for online tutoring services is not as high as in-person tutoring was on campus, tutors are still able to work and assist tutees, and tutees are still able to receive help.

Even though this experience has been a process, our attempts to connect and help each other deserve to be commended. Tutors and tutees are reliant upon each other at this time, not just in terms of idea exchange, but in terms of seeking personal connection. In the case of one student that I worked with recently online, she was thankful to talk to someone about organizing her psychology paper even though I am by no means a psychology expert. My guidance was more about the arrangement and verb choice. At the start of our session, I could hear kids in the background and the

frustration in her voice as she juggled school and childcare. Towards the end of the meeting, however, the tone had shifted to gratitude and relief. She was glad to talk to someone who “got it,” not just in terms of essay structure, but in terms of living in this “new normal.” I realized I felt the same way. It hit me that even amid uncertainty, we’re still finding ways to help each other.

Looking Forward from COVID-19: An Administrator’s Reflections

Sheree Huber Williams, Director of the Learning Commons

The pandemic and closure of our campuses significantly altered how we deliver tutoring, but the reason that our services exist has not changed. As the director of the Learning Commons, I supervise both the director of tutoring and the librarians, and as we move into the new academic year, I am considering how the arrival of COVID-19 will impact my work, particularly how it will change my focus in the area of tutoring.

As mentioned earlier, until April we did not have synchronous online tutoring. In-person tutoring was well-established at our two larger campuses, and we struggled with how to effectively deliver services at our four smaller campuses and to our online students. We promoted the limited in-person tutoring available at those locations, but my focus was on securing financial resources so that we could fully develop the tutoring services for students online and at the smaller campuses. With the arrival of COVID-19, we

began video tutoring and discontinued all in-person tutoring. What followed was a drastic drop in the number of students using tutoring services.

Tutoring will continue online this fall because of health concerns with in-person tutoring, so we can no longer depend on the high student traffic at our main campuses to provide data showing the positive correlation of tutoring and student success. From the perspective of securing resources, we must find ways to increase the usage of online tutoring so that we have adequate data to support our requests. Now, promoting tutoring to students and connecting them with our services is as important as promoting our services to administration.

It is easy to focus on the negatives when change is forced upon us in an unplanned and short timeframe, but are there some positives to be found? I think so.

- First, our mission has not changed. We are still “here” to support our students, even if the “here” looks different.
- We can now focus on a single service—online tutoring—rather than dealing with services at six locations, all with unique issues and challenges . . . and no regular staffing on-site at four of those campuses.
- We can request resources to expand an online service that exists rather than requesting resources for a program that is still to be developed.
- We now have tutoring for a broader range of subjects and classes available to students at the smaller campuses than when we were offering in-person tutoring at those sites.

- We are now better serving our online students, whereas we didn't offer online synchronous tutoring before the pandemic.
- Finally, we now have more equitable access to tutoring services for all of our students, regardless of their location or mode of class instruction . . . as long as they have the technology needed and can use it successfully.

Where do I need to put my attention in the coming academic year? I still need to promote tutoring to the administration so that we can secure the resources needed to support and expand services. This year I must also focus on activities that connect students to online tutoring. What questions do I need to consider?

- How do we better market our services to faculty and make it easy for them to connect their students to tutoring?
- Is there a better way to integrate information about tutoring into the Blackboard course shells, making it easier for students to know about us and find us?
- What are new ways to promote tutoring directly to students? How do we reach them?
- What do our students see as barriers to accessing online tutoring, including the barrier of technology? How can we help students clear these?

In this year we face uncertainty, but we are grounded in our purpose. The task of securing adequate resources to provide tutoring will continue, and the undertaking of assisting students with technology needs is daunting, but the

challenge of bringing students back to tutoring is an opportunity to better connect with those we are here to serve.

Past, Present, Fear, Change, and Cautious Optimism

Maria Fernanda Gonzalez, Tutoring Support Specialist

It is strange to think about how different today is compared to this time last year. Quarantine seems to have started ages ago, and the days started to blur together almost immediately. I do not remember a time when everyone's lives were abruptly changed in this way, though granted I have only been alive for 22 years. I had always imagined what it must have been like to live in a moment of history people read about 100 years later, only to realize that is the moment we are living in right now. I cannot help but ask myself how different the years following this pandemic will be. Did the people in 1918 know how much the world would change? Did it change drastically or was it a slow-burning change?

Despite the never-ending worry and existential questions one can conjure up at 3:34 AM because their sleep schedule has been completely ruined by mindless Netflix binging, I cannot help but feel privileged to be able to tutor and continue helping students from afar. Adjusting to a new normal has never been easy, so the hurtles and bumps have paradoxically been unexpectedly expected. However, our goal to help students has not changed during these uncertain times.

Seeing how my institution and colleagues have risen to meet the challenge head-on has given me hope that we will come out of this okay. As the saying goes, necessity begets innovation. Our plan to implement online tutoring within the

next few scholastic years was sped up to meet the needs of the students we serve right now. It has forced us to acknowledge the areas of the Learning Commons that need to be developed further, so that we may better serve a larger pool of students.

That being said, it has become difficult to gauge how much we are helping our students, due to a sudden reduction in the number of students we see. In response, we shifted our focus from implementing tutoring online to making students aware of the services available to them. I have seen nothing but enthusiasm from my peers to come up with new and innovative ways to engage students. As my colleagues in this piece have mentioned, it is difficult to create the same sense of community we had formed with in-person tutoring. We hope that videos about our services and social media posts introducing our tutors, even trying to come up with ways to help our underserved students by creating asynchronous tutoring methods, will encourage students to take part in rebuilding that community, or some semblance of it.

Thinking about the past puts in perspective our present and our future. The people of 1918 did not have the luxury we do of having an anxiety attack when we see our reflection (covered in potato chip crumbs and wearing a t-shirt that hasn't been washed in an embarrassingly long time) staring back at us when the credits roll and we scramble to skip to the next episode. Whether slow- or rapid-burning change, our small, dedicated community is up for the challenge. So, it is with cautious optimism that we look to what is to come for

our learning space once things return to normal (whatever normal may look like after COVID has come and gone).

We may not know what the future holds for us, as a society, as a college, or as a learning community of librarians, tutors, faculty, and students. We do know, however, that the world did not end in 1918. As tutors, we serve an ever-changing flow of students who will one day move on from college and use the skills they have learned to help their communities and families. Despite the perpetual uncertainty around us, the constant we can hold on to is the work we do to help our students and, in doing so, to help our communities, society, and world grow, with or sans COVID.

Conclusion

Our mission and commitment to our students are constants, and though the pandemic has thrown us off course, they serve as a north star. The pandemic dispersed our community, a central part of the Learning Commons, leaving us to try to rebuild or regather in a new, virtual location, and we face uncertainty in how, who, and when we will tutor. But whatever obstacles we must circumvent, whatever difficult terrain impedes us, we can look to our mission and commitment to remind us of our drive and our ultimate goal. They motivate us to make changes and to reflect on the effects of those changes so that we can continue toward meeting student needs.

Moving into the fall, we will work to address our various concerns. Given our limited knowledge about what the future holds—at the societal level but also at the level of the

institution—finding answers and planning will not be easy. But we have shown that we are resilient. We have demonstrated our flexibility. Our community dynamics, as Megan and Ben note, are evolving. We are, like Megan, Jessie and Maria point out, pulling together as a team to navigate uncertainty. Through all of this, we, like Elise, Sheree, and Maria, seek to be hopeful about the future. We move into fall 2020 acknowledging the challenges ahead, reaffirming the importance of the work we do, and feeling optimistic that we will serve our students.

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About the Authors



Maria Fernanda Gonzalez is a tutoring support specialist at Jefferson Community and Technical College in Louisville, Kentucky, where she started off as a peer tutor. She is currently working towards a Bachelor's in Computer Science and Engineering, and plans to attend graduate school.



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Benjamin Poe started working as a writing tutor at Jefferson Community and Technical College as a student. Since graduating with an associate degree in 2019, he has maintained supervisory and training positions at the tutoring center, while continuing to work toward his bachelor's in English at the University of Louisville.



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Sheree Huber Williams, Learning Commons Director at Jefferson Community and Technical College in Louisville, KY, has an MS in Library Science and a BA in Anthropology. A librarian for thirty years, Sheree's tutoring experience began five years ago when tutoring and library services consolidated. Recent coping mechanisms include jigsaw puzzles.



Elise Woods is an assistant tutoring coordinator and adjunct instructor at Jefferson Community & Technical College. She has served as a professional writing tutor since 2011. Prior to joining JCTC, she worked at Delaware County Community College and Saint Joseph's University in Pennsylvania.

COVID-19 as a Learning Assistance Professional: Face Masks, Online Platforms, Budget Cuts, AND... Growth?

By Rebecca Cofer

Georgia College and State University

I have experienced several traumas throughout my educational career, first as a college student and then as a professional in higher education. While I was a sophomore volunteering in the Writing Center at Virginia Tech, the world changed forever when 4 planes crashed and killed thousands on September 11th. After I moved to Texas Tech to work in the TECHniques Center, a specialized learning center for students with learning disabilities and AD/HD, the Virginia Tech shooting hit especially close to home for me as a Hokie (for those non-Tech alumni, the Hokie is the mascot for Virginia Tech and a term of pride for alums). In 2009, I moved to Georgia for a new job in academic support and was put on required furlough during the financial crisis of that year. I am not new to challenging circumstances as a learning assistance professional, but COVID-19 hit like a new kind of natural disaster, one that changed how I did my work, how I communicated with my students, and how I found value in a profession that has always been so much more than a job for me. This time, the challenge isn't just coping with the trauma itself, but also working around it, through it, and despite it.

At Georgia College, I immediately felt supported by the institution I had only been employed with for 9 months, but I also felt overwhelmed. How would we bring services that were based so much out of personal interactions to the masses in an online format? Anyone that knows me would tell you I am not a super tech-savvy individual, but COVID forced me to get acquainted with tools I had only peripheral experience with prior - Microsoft Teams, WebEx Teams, WebEx Meetings, Zoom, OneDrive, and Microsoft Planner. My daily routine moved from office chats with our Center's sweet student staff of tutors and SI Leaders to explorations of online tools to better serve these same students. Did I love this change in the work dynamic? No, of course not; I think that most learning center professionals are in the field because they thrive working with students in a face-to-face atmosphere. I often found myself thinking, "Online learning center work is not what I signed up for in 2007 when I first started in higher ed." Every day is met with new challenges and new requirements we had not considered before- how to best prepare for both online and face-to-face services in the fall: how to make training online engaging, the state of our budget for the upcoming year as COVID wreaks havoc on higher education. I could go on for hours about the challenges COVID-19 has brought to my work as a learning center professional. But instead, I am focusing on the positive this pandemic has brought to my professional life.

The Learning Center at Georgia College moved almost all of its services to the online format when COVID hit; though not immediately considered, there have been numerous

benefits that have even allowed us to consider a future with more of an online presence for accessibility and convenience. Our Supplemental Instruction (SI) program seamlessly moved online and still often had attendees. Attendees noted in our end of semester surveys the convenience of it, just being able to attend by turning on their computer. While many preferred the face-to-face format, some noted the convenience and helpfulness of the online format. Moving online provided our SI Leaders with yet another skillset in being flexible for life's unpredictability and the students who attend these sessions noticed that work. The Learning Center is considering implementing a few online sessions a week for the future, to reach students that may not have been able to attend sessions before. Without COVID, this idea would not have been on the forefront.

Personally, COVID has allowed me to connect more with the professional organizations that support my passion. I've stepped outside my comfort zone and hosted events with the CRLA Special Interest Group to engage members when many conferences have been canceled. I have worked to publish a study in *TLAR*; I know COVID gave me the time to edit that study during my evenings. In preparation for my NCLCA Leadership Certificate renewal in 2020, I have been using my lunch breaks at home to review how I can continue to develop in this leadership capacity. My days now include more online engagement, which has forced me to confront my anxieties about being on camera. Finally, the woman that hated to be on video for sake of all hearing her accent and mistakes, has now

presented on camera and recorded orientation sessions for the masses. COVID has changed higher education, and our world, significantly and while much of that change is not for the better, I think it's important that learning assistance professionals recognize the way it has increased our nimbleness and flexibility.

About the Author



Rebecca Cofer is the Programs Manager at the Learning Center at Georgia College and State University. Cofer has worked in centers at Virginia Tech, Texas Tech, and Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Educational Leadership from Georgia Southern University.

Hype and Gripes of a Writing Services Coordinator—COVID Edition

By David Kelly
University of Baltimore

Final Finish, at the University of Baltimore (UB), is a tradition hosted by the Writing Center, housed in the Robert L. Bogomolny (RLB) Library. During week 14 of each semester, the Writing Center, along with Academic Tutoring, Coaching, the Math & Statistics Center, and Research Librarians extend their hours until midnight to support students as they are completing their final writing, research, and project-based assignments. Students can walk-in or schedule an appointment to get the support they need. Food and giveaways are usually provided as both an incentive and a reward for attending the event. Final Finish is typically one of the biggest events held in the library; typical 100-150 students attend each semester. When Final Finish was moved online during UB's 2020 spring semester in response to the COVID-19 epidemic, ZERO students attended the event.

As reality set in that the rest of UB's semester would be facilitated online, the Final Finish planning committee worked to adapt the event. We met on March 5th, COVID-19 looming among whispers of everyone in the country being sent home for a week or two, to discuss set up, staffing, marketing, and budget. And by March 15th, the start of UB's spring break, the university received emails like many other universities around the country (and around the world), that we were

transitioning to telework to provide classes, services, and support online. I continued to come to work during the week of spring break; we had the option and I prefer the habit of getting up to commute to work every day, even if it's only a 12-minute ride. Frankly, the reality of the pandemic had not yet set in. On Friday the 19th, I left the building with my co-worker, Sharon; she coordinates academic coaching and tutoring services. As we walked to the parking garage we nervously laughed about seeing each other again in a week or so. We all know how that's turned out.

The planning committee met again the first week of April to discuss the logistics of having Final Finish online. We tested Zoom's registration feature, chat functions, and breakout rooms to simulate secure drop-in consultations. A schedule was made on WOnline (a platform used to schedule appointments and house data) for students who wanted to schedule appointments as well. I worked with the library's marketing committee to plan out a schedule of promotions across UB's website and social media platforms. When April 29th, week 14, at 6 pm arrived, all the tutors and library staff all greeted each other; we nervously laughed and chatted about our expectations for turnout. The event was scheduled from 6p to midnight. As each hour passed, tutors and staff staggered in and out of the Zoom chat room as they started and finished their shifts.

Insert crickets sound

By 10:30-11p, it was clear to tutors and staff that students were not going to show up. We were all a bit disappointed, and at the same time we recognized that many students might

be burned out, both by the shift to online and the effects of COVID-19 on our many ways of life. So much for carrying on business as usual!

Historically much of the attendance at Final Finish is tied to the physical space of the library, peer, in-person socialization, and of course FOOD! The more I think about it, maybe the physical tradition of Final Finish was an additional barrier. After all, you can't replicate a library space and food over Zoom. Looking forward to the fall I am considering making Final Finish a three-day long event where the Writing Center stays open until 10 or 11p, instead of our usual closing time 8p. I hope that starting the upcoming semester, knowing upfront that their courses are online will position students to better prioritize their academic needs, making them more likely to attend Final Finish and utilize other academic supports on campus.

The increased use of Zoom for work, classes, academic support, managing families from home, and many other factors kept some students from making appointments. Screen fatigue across personal, professional, and academic contexts and the real and perceived effects of COVID-19 has pushed us all to our limits. Another thing I am taking into consideration is the mental preparedness of students to start classes at the beginning of the semester online, as opposed to an abrupt shift from in-person or hybrid, to exclusively online.

Best case scenario: the continued work of tutors with students and promotions via social media will prompt students to attend the Final Finish.

Worst case scenario: the continued work of tutors with students and promotions via social media will prompt zero attendance to Final Finish, AGAIN!

I'm opting for a turnout somewhere in the middle, where at least a handful of students show up to get the support they need.

Either way, the Writing Center and UB will continue to adapt and evolve to this new paradigm by creating, improving, and delivering online services and support to better accommodate students' educational experiences.

The Writing Center has offered online writing consultations for ten years in both synchronous and asynchronous formats. For students already familiar with our services, the shift online was a double down on the processes they were familiar with. Familiarity with the Writing Center or not, I drafted messages collaboratively and alone to reach targeted audiences at the university to let them know that the Writing Center (and other academic support services) were still open for services, including the relevant links for additional information and scheduling appointments.

With the shift to online learning exclusively, students have continued to utilize the Writing Center. As you might imagine, there has been a slight reduction in appointments with students, but their writing needs have not changed. If anything, this abrupt shift has exacerbated those needs. In addition to thinking about how to effectively complete writing assignments, COVID-19 has made it unavoidably apparent that accessibility (internet, technology) and other socioeconomic barriers are having compounding effects on

students' learning. The questions around accessibility are a broader conversation for our country and institutions to address respectively.

UB is fortunate because many courses and services were already hybrid, serving students online and in-person. RLB Library is working on ways to make laptops available for students to check out so that they can keep up with their online courses and utilize academic supports. With the shift to online appointments only, students were given the option of having their appointments on Zoom, the text-based space in the WC Online appointment scheduler, or on the Online Writing Lab (OWL). The process for meeting us did not change. The only major difference is the shift from in-person to video or phone appointment via Zoom. The decision has always been up to the student how they would like to meet with us; consultations continue to be student-centered, focusing on writers' agency and autonomy in how the consultation is facilitated and the work done in the consultation.

Our writing center continued to meet for staff meetings weekly after moving all services online. We set our focus to revisit readings about online learning, directive vs. non-directive tutoring, and strategies to help students overcome writing barriers. One of my goals this past academic year was to re-invigorate the blog, "Writing that Works". The blog serves as an additional resource for students who want to read about academic writing and effective writing strategies through explicit knowledge transfer of the similarities and

differences of academic and professional writing genres they've encountered. This goal did not necessarily come to fruition, namely because I transitioned into this position as writing services coordinator and director of the writing center in July of 2019. I had to prioritize other deliverables and tasks, essential to supporting students. So, the blog took the back burner, but with some of the free time between consultations this summer, consultants drafted blog posts to support students writing in the upcoming academic year. We have continued to draft this summer and plan to have a bank of posts for the 2020-21 academic year.

The biggest transition in this space has been moving from in-person consultations and workshops to synchronously online. My approach for connecting with students has had to evolve in this new online environment. Much of writing center work before computers have relied on in-person social connection and interaction. I used to rely on the physical space and proximity of the students in the writing center to establish and build connections. I've had to be even more conscious and intentional: empathize, meet students where they are, encourage them, praise them, and give them the feedback they want and need.

As I reflect and write I see that, like many, while going through the motions of working from home, there was some expectation, some hope that we'd return to work before the spring semester ended; that everything would return to "normal". My increased anxiety and call to support my staff and students started to weigh me down. My attempts to keep it together and not fully acknowledge this crucial change in

our collective lives expose the dissonance between our old reality and this new one. I'm thankful for my colleagues at the writing center. We did a great job of rallying around each other, and re-prioritizing our goals to better support each other and students. Many of our discussions in staff training helped to remind me that a lot of the stress and anxiety that I'm feeling they and students are feeling as well. These kinds of interactions continue to affirm that this isn't just happening to me; the whole world has been affected by this!

Some days are more productive than others. Some days are harder to do work than others. I'm sure you feel this too. I hope you will stay encouraged. On days when I'm having a tough time, I think about why I became a writing services coordinator in the first place. I think about my peers, I think about the real impacts of our work with students; I think about students I've worked with and the ones I haven't worked with; I think about the Writing Center mission that I helped draft when I was a student is like a totem. Our mission gives me grounding and reminds me of my purpose, which goes beyond a job title. Those moments help put things in some perspective. This isn't about just me. This is about the US and how we work through so many of the things plaguing our society. And so, I leave you the Writing Center's mission statement and encourage you to find your grounding during these uneasy times.

The Writing Center will "continue to collaborate with the UB community to equip writers at all levels with the resources they need to become more skilled and more confident. We

will continue to help writers develop and improve their work at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to the final draft. A collaborative session in the Writing Center, in-person or online, provides a sounding board for new ideas and offers writers the confidence of knowing their thinking makes sense to a real reader. We will continue to facilitate relationships between faculty, the Writing Center, and student writers to enhance their experiences with writing in personal, professional, and academic contexts.”

About the Author



David Kelly, Jr., M.S., analyzes systems oppression and works to dismantle those systems in writing centers through building student agency. As the Writing Services Coordinator at the University of Baltimore, he strives to affirm students' agency and understanding of rhetorical situations so they can make more informed social and political decisions in their writing.

COVID-19 Leadership Lessons

By Nicholas Vick

Merry Low

Tallahassee Community College

It was the middle of March, just before Spring Break at Tallahassee Community College (TCC) when we were instructed by administration to plan for two weeks of remote learning and remote working. The two-week period has, as of this writing, turned into a five-month ordeal that has affected every part of our college, region, state, and nation. COVID-19 has global implications for every facet of society. For this article, we wanted to communicate two leadership perspectives (from the Director of the Learning Commons and the Program Coordinator) that focused on adjusting our operations and expectations during this turbulent time. Our leadership prioritizes safety and student access to our services. Currently, we are planning for a return to campus and continue to offer robust online services.

Convey a Sense of Calmness (Director of the Learning Commons)

As Director of the Learning Commons, I thought it was important to convey a sense of calmness to the staff. The early moments of quarantine life and adjusting to remote work were highly stressful. We were learning new phrases like social distancing and watching the news continuously for updates. Where are the new cases? How is it going to impact

us? Will the grocery stores run out of food? My goal was to be as calm as possible and listen intently to the concerns of my staff. I have tried to maintain that balance throughout this time. Behind the scenes, I was equally stressed and concerned, but during our first Zoom meeting together, I encouraged my team to go outside and take a walk. I advised stepping away from the computer and enjoying the sunshine during short breaks. These simple and practical suggestions helped to ease the tension of a stressful situation.

Embrace Change (Director of the Learning Commons)

The unpredictability of the pandemic led to many changes in daily work life. Suddenly, the staff was communicating on Microsoft Teams, creating new resources, and providing academic support in several ways. The staff did an amazing job learning new technologies quickly, and we were able to rather seamlessly pivot to an online structure that provided students with numerous options to receive assistance. These options included phone, synchronous, and asynchronous conferences. Our team created new videos and other digital content as well as substantially increased our social media activity. We continued hosting test reviews and workshops for students. Additionally, we reevaluated how we could promote our services to students. One technique that we discovered was helpful was emailing entire class sections as a way of virtually visiting the classes. We also invested time in learning a new text messaging platform to connect with students. Our Math Specialists began sharing weekly resources for faculty and students. Writing Specialists focused

on techniques for providing consistent feedback to students in the online environment. Finally, several of our tutors and specialists were embedded in-class sections to interact with students on an ongoing and intentional basis.

Develop a Flexible Plan (Program Coordinator)

In the weeks leading up to quarantine, I remember having a tab open on my computer that I dedicated to keeping track of the spread of COVID-19. Our community college was a few weeks out from taking Spring Break, and the idea of a pandemic that would affect us was slowly starting to permeate conversations from my team of tutors and colleagues. The week before Spring Break, it was still unknown as to whether or not we would be coming back to campus after the break or not. My team of tutors started to ask me questions about what our institution would be doing and I did not have an answer for them at the moment. My response for them was vague, but also specific: we need to prepare as if we are not coming back, and I need you to be paying attention to your email in the next week or so with updates.

Thankfully, we had a representative from GoBoard who visited us in the fall. After their visit and presentation, we thought that it would be a great enhancement to our tutoring services, but in the distant future. I am thankful for that connection, because the week before spring break, I reached out to this representative who gladly got my team set up for the possibility of remote tutoring. While the plan was not perfect, nor was it complete, it was a starting point for us if we

were asked to transition to a remote working environment. This plan was also not developed enough to the point where any slight change would shatter it to pieces. In other words, it was a plan, but it was a flexible one.

Build on Existing Norms (Program Coordinator)

Not only did we reach out to online tutoring platform partners, but we also built the plan based on existing virtual modes of operation that already existed. We highlighted an existing platform, Smarthinking, embedded in all of our students' learning management systems that could put them in contact with our staff. Since our academic support center is largely based on a walk-in (not appointments), we were faced with the challenge of how students would "walk-in" to the online version of our learning commons. The week before spring break, when all was unknown, we tested out our existing system that essentially puts our students in a queue/waiting room, to see if we could get their student identification (which links to their email), so we could connect with them through email. The digital software, Qless, which we use to eliminate lines generated the basic contact information necessary to translate into our virtual learning commons. With a few more adjustments, a system already known to students that we used in our physical space, became essential in our virtual space.

As if reaching out to students in this new online world of academic support was not challenging enough, we also had to contend with internal communication: how would our team of reception staff, part-time tutors, and full-time specialists all

correspond as we normally do in the physical space of our learning commons? Instead of adopting yet another online communication platform, we built off our institution's existing software (Microsoft Office), which contains a chat feature (Microsoft Teams) and many more collaborative tools. This particular software has aided with internal communication and has enhanced our academic support center in several ways, from providing a new hands-free means for part-time employees checking in for work, to sharing documents in a more engaging and environmentally-friendly manner, as well as encouraging connection for our team members during a very isolating time. Instead of reinventing the wheel, we used the wheels we had before us and built a vehicle to reach our students and continue to support them on their road to academic success.

Step Down so others can Step Up (Program Coordinator)

I titled the first email communication to our team, "This is the plan ... for now," quite intentionally. I wanted to humbly present a way for our learning support center to exist in the online universe when we had not developed a consensus in person before the pandemic. I was nervous that the plan would be scrutinized and insufficient, but I also knew that I needed to welcome feedback and constructive criticism. Once we communicated this imperfect start of a plan, I was amazed at how quickly and enthusiastically many of our colleagues not only supported it but helped to actualize and improve it. To incorporate the earlier car metaphor, taking our hands off

the wheel led others on our team to step up and use their unique crafts and skills to make the car run. This stepping down did not mean that our leadership was not involved in the daily grind of this process, but that there was space for others to creatively contribute and fill in the gaps of the sudden transition to the online version of our learning commons.

Practically speaking, one of our staff members developed videos to send to students to let them know how to find our tutoring services online. Another individual created an aesthetically-pleasing and informative website as a one-stop site for students to get all of the information they need for academic support. Many members of our team sent out class-wide emails to notify students of our online services. This online version of our academic support center has also given way to a new and improved version of our website – an endeavor that several staff members have taken on as their responsibility and privilege to improve. Our tutoring staff, including part-time and full-time, spent slower times (when students were not aware of our services, right after spring break), learning how to use the various online tutoring platforms.

Although communication was incredibly difficult, particularly in the beginnings of our “forced” online working environment, I am so proud of the way our team rose to the challenge of transitioning online to meet our students’ needs in the time of COVID-19. Witnessing everyone taking it upon themselves to play a part in this transition has affirmed and

bolstered my belief that when you step down, others will step up.

Conclusion

While this pandemic has drastically altered the way our lives look these days and how we go about our jobs, especially in higher education, we have chosen to focus on the positive lessons that we have learned and the new opportunities this challenge has brought our way. By remaining calm, embracing change, coming up with flexible plans based on existing practices, and allowing others to step up, we can honestly say that this trial has strengthened our team. Moreover, COVID-19 has forced us to enter into the world of virtual academic support – an area that was already blossoming on several levels without the pandemic. Before COVID-19, we had sought to improve our online presence at our institution and to make our services more available. Living through the pandemic, present tense has enabled us to deliver these services to students and improve the way that we reach out to students enrolled at our institution. We are encouraged by every member of our staff and how everyone has adapted with grace and innovation to the challenges in which we find ourselves these days.

Going through the fires of any hardship can either consume or refine those who undergo the heat. As for our learning center, we can confidently say that the latter has been true for our team.

About the Authors



Dr. Nicholas Vick is the Director of the Learning Commons and Honors Program at Tallahassee Community College. He has over 10 years of experience leading academic support programs and learning centers in community colleges.



Dr. Merry Low is the Program Coordinator of the Learning Commons at Tallahassee Community College. She oversees the team of part-time tutors and receptionists and is learning constantly about the roles of academic support centers in her second year in this position.

About the Editor



Michael Frizell, M.F.A., is the editor of *The Learning Assistance Review* and an editor of NCLCA's first book, *Learning Centers in the 21st Century*.

He is the author of *Bender*, a graphic novel about the first American serial killer family published by Oghma Creative Media, where he also writes the introductions for the re-releases of Harold Robbins novels. His creative nonfiction appears in numerous journals, and his poetry has been featured as part of "The Good Men Project." He recently co-authored an article on Supplemental Instruction's impact on first-year students that appeared in *The Journal of Experimental Education*.

As a writer with TidalWave Comics, he has written over sixty comics based on the lives of the famous and infamous. Recent publications include comics about Netflix's *Tiger King*, Christopher Reeve, Lewis Carroll, Ian Somerhalder, Prince, Miley Cyrus, Sheryl Sandberg, Chris Christie, Hillary Clinton, Rand Paul, Donald Trump, and Elizabeth Warren.

His fiction comics include *The Fantasy World of Bettie Page: Bettie Page and the Red Menace*, a Cold War era sci-fi action graphic novel featuring the authorized likeness of Bettie Page. He's also one of the writers of the upcoming *Stormy Daniels: Space Force*, a *Star Trek* meets *Barbarella* romp starring adult film star Stormy Daniels. His sci-fi fantasy comic, *Communion*, will debut in late 2020.

Michael currently serves as the Director of Student Learning Services at Missouri State University and holds an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from the University of Arkansas at Monticello. He lives in Springfield, Missouri with his wife, Julia, a high school English teacher.

The Learning Assistance Review

As an official publication of the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA), *The Learning Assistance Review* (TLAR) seeks to foster communication among higher education learning center professionals. Its audience includes learning center administrators, teaching staff, and professional or student worker tutors, consultants, mentors, and faculty members and administrators who are interested in improving the learning skills of post-secondary students. *TLAR* is available free of charge to all NCLCA members.

NCLCA defines a learning center at institutions of higher education as interactive, academic spaces which exist to reinforce and extend student learning in physical and/or virtual environments. A variety of comprehensive support services and programs are offered in these environments to enhance student academic success, retention, and completion rates by apply best practices, student learning theories, and addressing student-learning needs from multiple pedagogical perspectives. Staffed by professionals, paraprofessionals, faculty, and/or trained student educators, learning centers are designed to reinforce the holistic academic growth of students by fostering critical thinking, metacognitive development, and academic personal success.

TLAR aims to publish scholarly articles and reviews that address issues of interest to a broad range of academic professionals. Primary consideration will be given to articles about program design and evaluation, classroom-based research, the application of theory and research to practice,

innovative teaching strategies, student assessment, and other topics that bridge the gaps within our diverse and growing profession.

The journal is published twice a year. All submissions are subject to a masked, double-blind review process.

Administrators use their published work to continue the growth and development of the learning commons space on campus, while faculty may use their publications toward promotion and tenure at institutions where student success initiatives are rewarded as part of the process.

Pertinent Publishing Parameters

The Learning Assistance Review (TLAR), the national peer reviewed official publication of the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA), publishes scholarly articles and reviews that address issues of interest to learning center professionals (including administrators, teaching staff, faculty, and tutors) who are interested in improving the learning skills of postsecondary students. Primary consideration will be given to articles about program design and evaluation, classroom-based research, the application of theory and research to practice, innovative teaching and tutoring strategies, student assessment, and other topics that bridge gaps within our diverse profession.

Categories for Submission

Articles

- **Topics:** *TLAR* will accept manuscripts that address our purpose: to publish scholarly articles and reviews that address issues on program design and evaluation, classroom based research, the application of theory and research to practice, innovative teaching and tutoring strategies, student assessment, etc.
- **Types:** *TLAR* will accept manuscripts following all four of the article types outlined in the American Psychological Association Manual: empirical study and articles on review, theory, and methodology. Follow the APA manual for specific requirements and structure for each type; regardless, all manuscripts

need a clear focus that draws a correlation between the study, review, theory, or methodology and learning assistance practices.

Joining the Conversation

- **Idea Exchange:** Discussion directly relates to articles published in *TLAR*. Submissions are limited to fewer than four paragraphs and are to be constructive idea exchanges. In addition to the name, title, college, and contact information from the submitter, Idea Exchange submissions are to include the details of the referenced article (Title, author, and volume/number, and academic semester/year). A submission form may be found online on the *TLAR* website.
- **Further Research:** These article submissions that have a stated direct link to prior published *TLAR* articles. These articles will be considered following the manuscript submission guidelines.

Book Review

Book review requests should be accompanied with two copies of the book to facilitate the reviewing process. Potential book reviewers are urged to contact the editorial team for details.

Manuscript Guidelines

Manuscripts and reference style must be in accordance with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Submissions that do not comply with APA style will be returned to the author(s). Manuscripts must be original

work and not duplicate previously published works or articles under consideration for publication elsewhere. The body of the manuscript may range in length from 10 to 15 pages, including all references, tables, and figures. Longer articles will be considered if the content warrants it. The authors are responsible for the accuracy of all citations and references and obtaining copyright permissions as needed. The only acknowledgments that will be published will be those required by external funding sources.

Submission Guidelines

Pertinent information

- The title page must include the title of the manuscript (not to exceed 12 words); the name(s) and institutional affiliation(s) of all authors.
- The lead author should provide work and home addresses, telephone numbers, fax, and e-mail information where applicable.
- The second page should be an abstract of the manuscript. Abstracts are limited to 100 words.
- To start the reviewing process, the lead author will be required to sign a certificate of authorship and transfer of copyright agreement. If the manuscript is accepted for publication, a second authorization agreement must be signed by the author or authors.

Submission Packets

- Cover page
- Original manuscript

- Masked manuscript for review
- Abstract (maximum 100 words)
- Figures and tables must be black and white and follow APA style

For Submissions or Questions

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Author(s) will receive an e-mail notification of the manuscript receipt. The review process may include a peer-review component, in which up to three members of the *TLAR* editorial board will review the manuscript. Authors may expect the review process to take about three months. Authors may receive one of the following reviewing outcomes:

- accept with minor revisions
- revise and resubmit with editor's review only
- revise and resubmit for second full editorial board review
- reject

As part of the reviewing correspondence, authors will be electronically sent the reviewers rankings and general comments on one document and all the reviewers' contextual markings on one manuscript. Manuscript author(s) must agree to be responsible for making required revisions and resubmitting the revised manuscript electronically by set deadlines. Manuscript author(s) must abide by editorial revision decisions.

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About the Cover Artist



Abstract #1



DA Frizell has degrees in both graphics and fine art. He is internationally known as a rock artist for his work with producer TwentyFourCore (Avenged Sevenfold, Sevendust, and Disturbed) and Nuclear Blast Entertainment (Wednesday 13). David has worked in professional photography, on comic and magazine publications, created stage props for live entertainment, illustrated music CD and DVD cover and interiors, animated music video backgrounds, and designed apparel and a wide range of souvenirs.

His latest project, *Bender*, a graphic novel written with his brother, Michael Frizell, is available on Amazon.com.