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TRAINING PEER TUTORS: AN EVALUATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN SPEAKING CENTERS

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TRAINING PEER TUTORS: AN EVALUATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN

SPEAKING CENTERS

BY

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ABSTRACT

As an article published in the 2015 issue of the Communication Center Journal points out, "it would be useful to assess the different ways in which those [NACC Tutor Training Certification] guidelines might be implemented, and what variables should be considered in different contexts" (Turner, p. 5). The same article asks the question "how can we determine and improve the effectiveness of our training of tutors" (Turner, p.5). While not required, the National Association of Communication Centers (NACC) has a process in place to certify tutor training programs, but the application form is unclear in its definitions. This study aims to answer these and other questions so that it can be determined (1) if/how these best practices are implemented across the country and (2) evaluate if these best practices create a feeling of preparedness in tutors post-training.

Two surveys were sent out, one to current/past tutors and one to directors asking them to reflect upon the training procedures at their respective universities. After data collection, it was found that the use of videos in training was the most strongly correlated to tutors' feelings of preparedness post training.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A job requirement listed on almost every job posting is "excellent oral and written communication skills". While many universities have writing centers to assist students with the development of their written communication skills, only about 125 universities have speaking or communication centers to help students develop those oral communication skills.

While the importance of oral communication skills is widely recognized, there seems to be a lack of support in developing these skills provided to students. Speaking centers can help students develop their public speaking skills, and some offer mock interviews or conversational consultations to help with students' interpersonal communication competence. As Persneau-Conway and Romerhausen (2012) state, "the communication center that operates as an extension of the university classroom holds unique possibilities by both assisting students in the more traditional aspects of the learning process while also circumventing many of the traditional barriers posed by the nature of the 'classroom'"(p. 39). Speaking centers, then, are a resource in need of development and expansion. Communication center research, such as this study, can help increase the impact centers can have on a campus community.

For example, the University of Rhode Island's Speaking Center is small and under-utilized. In my two years as Graduate Associate Director, we have had anywhere from 2-12 tutors who are only able to work at the center for a limited

number of credits and get a very informal training through the shadowing of more experienced tutors, email tips, and sporadic meetings throughout the semester. So, this study came out of a desire to create a more consistent and effective training process.

Considering my prior experiences and my professional goals to design and direct a communication center, I cannot stress enough the importance of having this form of supplemental support or instruction. However, just having a speaking center is not enough. It needs to be run effectively with consistently trained tutors. This study aims to determine (1) if/how tutor training best practices are implemented across the country and (2) evaluate if these best practices create a feeling of preparedness in tutors post-training. From there, the results of the study can be used to make recommendations for changes in the University of Rhode Island center's training practices.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a Speaking Center and What Purpose do they Serve?

According to the NACC website, as of October 2018, just over 125 speaking or communication centers are in operation at universities across the country. Turner and Sheckels (2015) define communication centers as "on campus facilities where students receive individualized assistance and feedback from trained peer tutors" (p. xi). These centers "offer tutoring for oral communication in genres such as presentations, discussions, debates,[and] interviews, using a variety of means including one-on-one and group consultations, workshops, online assistance, and self-paced instruction" (p. xi). Overall, Turner and Sheckels (2015) claim

> Communication centers emphasize enhanced eloquence as a means of enabling
> individuals to become better learners and productive members of the
> community as well as self-actualized individuals. They promote effective and
> ethical communication, demonstrate the central educational value of
> communication, promote the inclusion of the communication discipline in
> studies of other academic programs, and attract media attention to the role of
> communication in the classroom and the workplace. (p.xii)

Yook and Atkins-Sayre 2012 say that communication centers not only assist with all that Turner and Sheckels highlight, but they have also "proven themselves to be invaluable in contributing to student success, retention, and graduation by

providing pedagogical support for students" (p. xi). Communication Centers exist, then, to do more than simply assist students with all parts of the speech-making process if the expansion of a student's ability to communicate leads to these aforementioned benefits. Research further illustrates the overall value of better communication, stemming from research that recognizes that "'communication apprehension and hesitancy to communicate undermine academic and professional performance'", further exploration discovered that "better communicators are better students: more articulate, more confident students have higher scores on college entrance exams, higher GPAs, more positive attitudes toward school, and better college retention rates (Turner & Sheckels, 2015, p. xiii). What is unique about these findings is that if we look just a little closer, research done specifically on peer tutoring, including communication centers, found a higher correlation between the providence of communication assistance and GPAs/retention rates. Another goal, then, of communication centers is not simply to fix how a student delivers their message, but how they approach the process. They aim to emphasize the complex process of critical thinking and communication, to lead students to the realization that "communication isn't … a nice little addition after the heavy lifting is done: communication is heavy lifting", that it is a "dynamic, ongoing, challenging, frustrating, rewarding" process that "requires audience analysis, research, evaluation, and integration of perspectives and concepts, and making decisions about a range of options, including how to… enact a rhetorical balance of bringing speaker, audience, and topic together" (Turner & Sheckels, 2015, p. xiv).

Having operational speaking centers on campuses not only benefits the students by giving them the opportunity to learn tactics to help them to "reduce communication anxiety and experience an increase in self-confidence and marketability in the workplace", but benefit the faculty, departments, and the discipline as a whole as well. The faculty can benefit by being equipped to teach better and teach more satisfying classes, and the departments and the discipline "gain visibility and an appreciation of their valuable contributions, because 'lab programs build bridges and increase awareness on the campus of the discipline and its content'" (Turner & Sheckels, 2015, p. 12).

Peer Tutors and their Training

As it relates to this study, probably the most important aspects of Turner and Sheckels's (2015) definition of a communication center is the emphasis placed on the *feedback from trained peer tutors*. Students do not just use the services that the center provides, "they are also the tutors (also called peer consultants, coaches, advisors, and mentors)" (Turner & Sheckels, 2015, p. xiv). Butler University believes that "the experience of peer tutoring gives… students the opportunity to not only sharpen their oral skills, but also their problem solving, listening, organizational, and networking skills as well" (Turner & Sheckels, 2015, p. 16). This experience is one that is mutually beneficial, however, Vangelisti et al. (1999) point out that "the lack of training of some volunteer tutors could also create more harm than good. To refer back again to the definition provided by Turner and Sheckels, tutors are not simply peer tutors providing feedback, they are trained in how to do so.

The term peer tutor allows for the possibility for a blurred line between tutor and tutee that must be tread with care. So it is worth noting here what a peer tutor does and does not do before exploring the content of tutor training. While in a session, a tutor should not do the work for the student, as that would violate academic integrity, but instead should assist in identifying problems, make suggestions, and ask questions to "help the client to discover for himself or herself both the problems and the possible solutions" (Turner & Sheckels, 2015, p. 55-56). Turner and Sheckels (2015) also suggest that tutors should be trained in how to effectively start a session, handle the various problems that might present themselves within the 30-minute to an hour session, address a client's communication apprehension, and then closing the session in a way that summarizes what happened in the session and what could happen next.

Turner (2015) posed the question "where do we go from here?" with speaking center research. She communicated her solutions as peer tutors are trained to do, by asking further questions and tentatively making suggestions. One of these questions caught my attention: "how can we determine and improve the effectiveness of our training of tutors?". Turner (2015) responds,

> When I first learned that I would be starting a new communication center, no single aspect of the venture terrified me as much as training my tutors well. NACC's tutor training certification process now provides guidelines; it would be useful to assess the different ways in which those guidelines might be implemented, and what variables should be considered in different contexts. What are the forms of time-on-task, and how can they be combined effectively? What modes of training are available, and what modes use

particular purposes well? How can the topics of training—including overviews, tutoring expertise, communication instructional expertise, and administrative expertise—be approached? How can continuing training and evaluation of tutors further their education as well as the goals of the center? How can scholarship in such areas as interviewing be incorporated into our training processes? How have our training techniques prepared our tutors for life beyond the center? Could social media be used for cross-institutional training (e.g., through role-playing)? Surveys of both clients and tutors, as well as former tutors, compilations and comparisons of training programs, and assessments of their effectiveness would all increase our understanding. (Turner, 2015, p. 5)

These questions Turner puts forward would indeed propel communication center literature forward if members of this community are willing to do the work. However, how we train our tutors can directly impact the impact our centers make. Therefore, it seemed necessary to explore the answers to this question, as well as others that presented themselves while reviewing literature. Literature has revealed the best practices for training tutors, and the NACC has established a tutor training program certification process that provides guidelines for how tutors might be trained. But, this certification process is not required, and the form utilized to apply for certification is vague in terms of definition and description.

Taking into consideration these points, as well as the timing and resources available at this time, this study will address the following research questions:

RQ1: What training processes are currently in place across the country?

RQ2: How do different training practices impact tutors' feelings of preparedness post-training?

RQ3: How do training practices differ at institutions where tutors feel more prepared?

Methods of training vary across centers, based on a multitude of factors, some of which are to be explored in this study. Turner and Sheckels highlight that whatever approach a center utilizes, it should be consistent across the center staff and ensure three aspects: "similar conceptual bases, an understanding of the tutoring process, and an opportunity for the staff to bond as a team" (2015, p. 16-17). Along the same lines, while the methods of training may vary, they should contain the same variables: a combination of modes, time on task (or shadowing/practice), and in-depth coverage of a range of topics. A mode is the delivery of training,

Possible modes are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Modes:	Semester long, credit-bearing course
	Intensive workshop before the center opens
	Weekly meetings
	Selected readings
	Selected videos
	Observation and shadowing/practice

In training, a wide range of topics may be covered, from an overview of the role of communication in public life to those topics utilized in the tutoring process and specific to the individual center. These topics are listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Overview/ Administrative Expertise
- The role of communication in public life
- Mission and needs of the institution & how the center meets those needs
- Referral abilities (to other academic services as well as counseling services)
- Emergency procedures
- Record keeping procedures
- Mastery of documents, handouts, and technology

Tutoring Expertise
(How to Effectively Facilitate a Session)
- Techniques for successfully beginning and ending a session
- The ability to set goals for and plan a session
- The ability to ask probing questions
- Interpersonal communication skills (including listening skills)
- An awareness of the role-modeling behavior a tutor enacts
- An awareness of the ethics governing a tutoring situation
- An awareness of different learning styles and an ability to adapt to them

Communication Instructional Expertise
(The Ability to Identify & Provide Feedback on all Parts of the Speech Making Process in Various Contexts)
- The ability to analyze an assignment
- The ability to help a student identify an appropriate topic
- The ability to help a student generate and research material
- An understanding of and the ability to help a student use the resources of logos, ethos, and pathos
- The ability to help a student organize material effectively and to understand the implications of various organizational patterns
- The ability to help a student develop effective introductions, transitions, and conclusions
- An understanding of what constitutes effective verbal and nonverbal delivery and the ability to help a student identify and address delivery problems
- The ability to help a student use audiovisual resources effectively]
- Diagnostic abilities
- An understanding of and the ability to help a student address communication apprehension
- The ability to help a student handle q and a
- An understanding of the differences between individual and group presentations
- An understanding of small group dynamics
- An understanding of interviewing, debating, and other special or discipline-specific communication situations
- An understanding of ESL students' cultural and language difficulties and the ability to work effectively with these students to overcome the difficulties

NACC has laid out these guidelines but doesn't explain how or why they arrived at these modes and topics, or how they decided that these modes and topics would best prepare tutors. Troillett & McIntyre (2012) mention the experiential training model that involves five steps (tell, show, invite, encourage and correct) that are represented by the different modes of training. However, their study discovered important experiential based consistencies in our approaches to staff training and assessment, not the actual content of the training. Their noted best practices here include "valuing explicit learning outcomes, employing experiential learning, developing a guided training process, training for emergency protocols, using assessment data to inform future learning, and recognizing the accomplishments of staff" (Troillett & McIntyre, 2012, p. 268). As evidenced by the literature, there has been discussions on why we use peer tutors, training tutors, and on organizational training in general, but when considering speaking center training specifically, there has yet to be an in-depth exploration of these modes and topics and their implementation. The collection of data in this study will hopefully validate these best practices and determine which modes or topics lead to greater feelings in preparedness in tutors post training.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Two surveys, adapted from the NACC certification survey (appendix A), were

be administered through Surveymonkey, one to directors of speaking centers

(appendix B), the other to be distributed to current and past tutors (appendix C).

Participants were recruited through the NACC listserv and related Facebook groups.

Members of the NACC listserv are directors, administrators, and students from

speaking centers across the country, so all those that received the link to access the

surveys are considered eligible to participate. The surveys do not ask for personal

information, rather we use descriptive data of participants professional training.

Participants:

The participants in this study are current directors of speaking centers and

those who currently hold or have held tutoring positions within speaking centers. Their

ages range from 18-75. To ensure confidentiality given the small sample size, we

chose not to collect data on age, gender, or ethnicity.

After data collection, a total of 45 responses were collected. We received 14

director responses and 31 tutor responses. 14 of the 31 tutor responses were from one

institution, and there were five institutions where both tutors and their director

responded. For both groups of respondents, their official titles varied, and though

there were themes in directors titles, 10 did have the word, director, in their official

title even if it was in conjunction with other roles held at their institution. Tutors' titles

varied as well, but 23 respondents had the word, consultant, in their title. In terms of experience level, tutors' reported working as a tutor anywhere from half a year to ten years. Two years was the most frequent tenure, with ten tutors responding as such. Directors did not report their tenure at the institution, but the centers themselves have been established at institutions for as little as three years and as long as 32 years (and counting). The tutoring processes in question for this study also had similar tenure to the age of the center.

Measures:

Data was collected from both directors and tutors. Director responses were used as a baseline for what was intended and planned for training and tutor responses were collected to determine what was received and retained after training.

RQ1: What training processes are currently in place across the country?

To determine the answer to this question, both tutors and directors are asked what modes are used in training (Tutors survey item 6, Directors Survey item 11).

RQ2: How do different training practices impact tutors' feelings of preparedness post-training?

Tutor Survey item numbers 1, 6,8,9,10, 11, 12, and 13 reference modes used in training and tutors' feelings of preparedness to handle a variety of situations that could occur during a session. The situations selected are some of the ones that Turner and Sheckels (2015) note as common obstacles tutors might run into and range from the content of a session, to academic integrity, and client mindset to measure overall feelings of preparedness.

RQ3: How do training practices differ at institutions where tutors feel more prepared?

Survey responses to Tutors survey item 6 and Directors Survey item 11 are compared to Tutor Survey item numbers 1, 6,8,9,10, 11, 12, and 13 which reference modes used in training and tutors' feelings of preparedness to handle a variety of situations that could occur during a session. The situations selected are some of the ones that Turner and Sheckels (2015) note as common obstacles tutors might run into and range from the content of a session to academic integrity, and client mindset.

Research design:

For this study, a cross-sectional survey design was chosen for a convenience sample due to time and funding limitations of the study. It was determined that this was the best way to reach respondents in the time available. Directors were chosen to complete the survey because they are normally the ones who train tutors, and then tutors were asked to complete the survey since they are the ones being trained and we wanted to measure their feelings of preparedness post-training.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What training processes are currently in place across the country?

After the surveys were administered, 45 total responses were received; 14 from center directors and 31 from tutors. As seen below, the use of a credit-bearing, semester-long course was most frequently reported by directors, followed by an intensive workshop prior to the center's opening and the use of weekly meetings. Tutors reported the use of observation and shadowing most frequently but also reported high use of weekly meetings and a semester-long, credit-bearing course. However, it was found that most centers utilize a combination of modes in their training procedures. This follows with Turner and Sheckels's (2015) recommendation.

Table 1.

Training Mode	Director Responses	Tutor Responses
Semester-Long, Credit Bearing Course	57.14%	77.42%
Intensive Workshop Before Center Opens	42.85%	45.16%
Weekly Meetings	28.57%	87.09%
Observation and Shadowing	21.42	90.32%
Selected Videos	21.42%	67.74%
Selected Readings	14.28%	74.19%

The table above uses the Directors' responses as a baseline and are listed in descending order. Any variation in responses may be due to a larger number of responses from tutors at one university, or lack of response from tutors where we had a director response and vice versa.

Research Question 2: How do different training practices impact tutors' feelings of preparedness post training?

Once we found the frequency of training modes, we looked at tutors' feelings of preparedness after going through training. We explored both modes of training and topics covered.

Modes

In terms of which training modes had the most impact on tutors' feelings of preparedness, the use of video led to greater feelings of preparedness when looking at a composite view of modes. Stepwise regression was used to investigate which variables had the strongest relationship to feelings of preparedness. Mode variables were entered with a $p<.05$ standard used for inclusion in the final model and a $p>.10$ standard for removing previously entered variables. The final model showed a statistically significant relationship between the predictor variables and preparedness $(F= (1,27) = 8.439\ p = .007)$. The final regression equation was Prepared = C + .488video. Tutors that received video training had a mean rating of preparedness of 28.16 while those who did not have a mean of 24.7. While these results may identify that video training is uniquely suited to engendering confidence in tutors, it is also plausible that programs with high resources and extensive training options engender confidence and the presence or absence of video acts as a marker for those programs.

When looking each mode individually, the analysis indicated that videos were still the most statistically significant at .009, followed by the use of weekly meetings at .012 and finally the use of the semester-long credit-bearing course at .03. Workshops, observation, and shadowing, and readings were found to not be statistically significant in tutors' feelings of preparedness post training.

Topics

After looking at the modes in use, we looked at how the topics covered throughout training impact tutors' feelings of preparedness (or if the coverage of certain topics led to higher feelings of preparedness. Overall, it was found that the more topics covered in training the more prepared tutors would feel (corr. 482, mean 16.67, standard deviation 6.79). Individually, there were some topics that were more highly correlated to feelings of preparedness. Table 2 highlights these topics.

Table 2.

Topic	Correlation to Feelings of Preparedness	Significance
Techniques for successfully beginning and ending a session	.053	.395
The ability to set goals for and plan a session	.243	.107
The ability to ask probing questions	-.002	.496
Interpersonal communication skills (including listening skills)	.242	.107
An awareness of the role-modeling behavior a tutor enacts	*.414**	*.014*
An awareness of the ethics governing a tutoring situation	*.385**	*.022*
An awareness of different learning styles and an ability to adapt to them	*.488***	*.004*
The ability to analyze an assignment	.156	.214
The ability to help a student identify an appropriate topic	*.356**	*.032*
The ability to help a student generate and research material	*.443***	*.009*
An understanding of and the ability to help a student use the resources of logos, ethos, and pathos	*.580***	*.001*
The ability to help a student organize material effectively and to understand the implications of various organizational patterns	*.513***	*.003*
The ability to help a student develop effective introductions, transitions, and conclusions	*.513***	*.003*

An understanding of what constitutes effective verbal and nonverbal delivery and the ability to help a student identify and address delivery problems	*.578****	*.001*
The ability to help a student use audiovisual resources effectively	.239	.110
Diagnostic abilities	*.424**	*.012*
An understanding of and the ability to help a student address communication apprehension	.239	.110
The ability to help a student handle q and a	.131	.254
An understanding of the differences between individual and group presentations	*.512***	*.003*
An understanding of small group dynamics	*.580****	*.001*
An understanding of interviewing, debating, and other special or discipline-specific communication situations	*.472***	*.006*
An understanding of ESL students' cultural and language difficulties and the ability to work effectively with these students to overcome the difficulties	*.508***	*.003*

Upon analysis, it can be observed that the topics that have a statistically significant correlation with tutors' feelings of preparedness are topics that deal mainly with the procedures of a session and the content of a presentation itself.

Research Question 3: How do training practices differ at institutions where tutors feel more prepared?

As for the training processes in use at universities where tutors felt more prepared, we observed the average feeling of preparedness at each institution and compared that to the practices in use at each university and found once again that those centers that utilize a combination of modes yield greater feelings of preparedness.

Additional Findings

Once tutors go through training, I wanted to know which topics tutors found themselves using the most in their jobs. The top 5 topics tutors found themselves referencing are found in Table 3.

Table 3.

Topic	Response Rate
The role of communication in public life	32.26%
Mission and needs of the institution & how the center meets those needs	22.58%
Techniques for successfully beginning and ending a session	*70.97%*
The ability to set goals for and plan a session	61.29%
The ability to ask probing questions	54.84%
Interpersonal communication skills (including listening skills)	64.52%
An awareness of the role-modeling behavior a tutor enacts	38.71%
An awareness of the ethics governing a tutoring situation	38.71%
An awareness of different learning styles and an ability to adapt to them	*70.97%*
The ability to analyze an assignment	45.16%
The ability to help a student identify an appropriate topic	61.29%
The ability to help a student generate and research material	45.16%

An understanding of and the ability to help a student use the resources of logos, ethos, and pathos	51.61%
The ability to help a student organize material effectively and to understand the implications of various organizational patterns	*74.19%*
The ability to help a student develop effective introductions, transitions, and conclusions	*77.42%*
An understanding of what constitutes effective verbal and nonverbal delivery and the ability to help a student identify and address delivery problems	*80.65%*
The ability to help a student use audiovisual resources effectively	54.84%
Diagnostic abilities	19.35%
An understanding of and the ability to help a student address communication apprehension	32.26%
The ability to help a student handle q and a	32.26%
An understanding of the differences between individual and group presentations	48.39%
An understanding of small group dynamics	54.84%
An understanding of interviewing, debating, and other special or discipline-specific communication situations	29.03%
An understanding of ESL students' cultural and language difficulties and the ability to work effectively with these students to overcome the difficulties	54.84%
Referral abilities (to other academic services as well as counseling services)	29.03%
Emergency procedures	22.58%
Record keeping procedures	45.16%
Mastery of documents, handouts, and technology	48.39%

The topics tutors found themselves using most are the communication

instructional expertise topics that deal with the content of the presentation and

delivery. This makes sense since the majority of sessions deal with the content of presentations and their delivery. It is also interesting to note that those topics tutors use most in sessions are topics that also have a statistically significant correlation to tutors feelings of preparedness when the topics are covered in training.

Finally, since director responses were utilized as a baseline for what was intended for training and tutors' responses for what was actually learned and retained during training, I wanted to look at if tutors perceive that they are receiving the same education as directors intended. To do this, I sorted tutors by University and averaged tutor responses, then compared that average tutor response to the directors' responses. This could only be done with the five universities where both tutors and directors responded to their respective surveys. When looking at these comparisons, two things stuck out: first, at one institution even when the director did not note coverage in training tutors responded that the topic was covered but on the flipside, at another institution, there were a couple of topics that tutors did not note coverage of in their training but directors did. This could be for a couple of reasons. First, when filling out the survey tutors might worry about results getting back to directors and wanting to pretend that they learned more than they did or they came across that knowledge outside of training so they know how to respond to certain situations or they know how to handle certain topics even though the director did not directly teach them how to. Additionally, when looking at trends in topics covered in training at different institutions, there was not a single topic included in all training and not a single topic that was consistently left out.

DISCUSSION

Overall Discussion of Findings

Overall, it was found that most universities heed Turner and Sheckels's (2015) recommendation that a combination of training methods should be used to train tutors. The combination of modes allows for the accommodation of different learning types. Addressing multiple learning types within training ensures that each student has the potential to receive the training message in their preferred way of learning…[A student's learning style] represents a cluster of personality and mental characteristics that influence how a pupil perceives remembers, thinks, and solves problems" (Wahlen et al., 2013). Furthermore, "researchers have used learning styles research as a framework for predicting and improving educational achievement as well as improving vocational selection, guidance, and placement. It only makes sense that when designing and facilitating learning experiences, in addition to organizational and environmental contexts, the characteristics of the learner be taken into consideration" (Lum et al., 2011). Approaching training from this perspective can break down learning barriers and help train tutors so that they can successfully do the same. It was also found that those universities that use a combination of training methods and cover more topics lead to greater feelings of preparedness in tutors post-training. The more topics covered through different channels, the more prepared tutors will feel.

However, when looking at a composite of all training modes, the use of video has the most impact on tutors' feelings of preparedness. When looking at each mode individually, videos, weekly meetings, and a semester-long, credit-bearing course

22

were all statistically significantly related to greater feelings of preparedness. For videos, this could be explained by tutors' ability to go back and re-watch these videos and learn at their own pace. Video could also potentially be the most statistically significantly related to feelings of preparedness simply because of the age of those going through training; technology is becoming more and more prevalent in our society and in the classroom, so perhaps students prefer to watch a video rather than read 50 pages. However, we do not know how videos are being utilized within training, so further research into this mode would be necessary to provide a complete explanation. Weekly meetings and a semester-long course could help increase feelings of staff cohesion, and the extended amount of time students are spending with the material could help increase feelings of preparedness.

Within whatever modes of training, though, it is important to cover a broad range of topics because, as the data suggests, tutors feel more prepared when more topics are covered in training. Topics that need to be covered fall in the categories of Communication Instructional Expertise and Tutoring Expertise, since those topics cover the content of a session. Overview and Administrative Expertise topics can be adjusted as is appropriate for each center. Essentially, the more topics covered through a combination of different modes leads to greater feelings of preparedness post training.

Recommendations for the University of Rhode Island's Speaking Center

Currently, the University of Rhode Island Speaking Center tutor training process is very unstructured and might not lead to tutors feeling prepared to do their

jobs. From the knowledge garnered through this research, I propose the following changes to the University of Rhode Island's Speaking Center training.

In an ideal world, I would suggest a complete overhaul of the Speaking Center to begin with. This would not be a quick fix, but a transformation that would help the center better serve our campus community. To do this, we would have to close down the Speaking Center in its current iteration. From there, a semester-long, credit-bearing course would be developed that students who are interested in becoming a tutor would have to take before being hired. Implementing this course would then ensure that training is consistent across all staff members and that the three aspects Turner and Sheckels recommend are met. I also recommend the development of a course due to its statistically significant relation to tutors' feelings of preparedness.

With the generous timeline a semester-long, credit-bearing course brings, the content of the course would be able to be more comprehensive and cover a broader range of topics, while also allowing time to really focus in on the communication instruction expertise topics most significantly related to tutors' feelings of preparedness. When covering these topics, this study suggests that videos are the mode with the most statistically significant relationship to feelings of preparedness post training. So, in an ideal world, video would be utilized in three ways within the course. First, videos would be used to create a flipped classroom where students learn the material which would allow for more hands-on activities addressing different learning styles and would provide more opportunities for the staff to bond as a team. The second way videos would be used would be to open up discussion of the practices being shown in the video, letting students identify best practices while also allowing

them to develop their own tutoring style. Finally, another potential use for videos would be to actually have the students create training videos as a project for the course.

Additionally, despite the fact that this study did not find the use of observation/shadowing/practicum to be statistically significant to tutors' feelings of preparedness, I would still propose that a significant amount of time during the semester in which the student takes the course be spent physically in the center observing its daily operations, bonding with existing staff, and eventually engaging in supervised sessions so that they can apply the knowledge learned in the training course while also having the opportunity to defer to a staff member with more experience if they get stuck. This aligns with Turner and Sheckels's recommendation that there be a significant amount of time spent on task. While this study did not find this practice to be statistically significantly related to feelings of preparedness, this could be due to the fact that the majority of the centers who responded to the survey incorporate some variation of the use of this mode, so this could have led to there not being an adequate level of comparison when attempting to judge if it is related to feelings of preparedness.

Only after successful completion of the course would students be eligible to become tutors. Once a student becomes a tutor, there would be weekly meetings to converse about the happenings around the center, reinforce knowledge of topics learned in training, and provide further opportunity for the staff to bond as a team.

The process described here represents changes to the URI center's training that is consistent with the results of this study and recommendations made by literature,

using a combination of modes and covering a wide range of topics. Incorporating this process into URI's center could then ensure that our tutors have the knowledge and support to better serve our students. I mentioned previously that I would propose a complete overhaul, and this would only be one aspect of this overhaul. Additional changes include the structure of how the center is staffed, as well as our physical and structural locations within URI as an organization, but these are conversations for another paper altogether. This study allows for the beginning of this conversation which can lead to more informed decisions moving forward.

Limitations of the Study

It seems necessary to note here the limitations of this study. The first limitation would be that this study did not seek to find out how these modes and topics are implemented. Any training method would lead to feelings of preparation if they are implemented effectively. Expanding upon this study, it would be interesting to review course materials from the different training programs, or even go visit each center and observe their training programs, completing ethnographic research through interviews and observations. That would require more time and funding than was currently at our disposal. Other limitations include our small sample size and the fact that there were some centers we received responses from directors but not tutors and vice versa. This limitation was noted at the start of this study, but the number of respondents and the influx of responses from one institution over others could have had an impact on the results of data analysis.

While on the topic of respondents, another potential limitation of the study could be in the participants themselves. Those centers that did respond have recently

contributed to the forward movement of communication center scholarship or may already have these best practices implemented into their training processes so they may not have had any qualms about responding to the surveys. Additionally, those centers that did not respond may not be particularly active on the listserv or may not have a consistent training process to report on. Hopefully, the results of this study will inform them in a way that will help them create the changes they need.

Recommendations for Future Research

Moving forward, we can refer to Turner's article (2015) to further delve into this topic. Referring back to her initial question, "how can we determine and improve the effectiveness of our training of tutors?" I wonder if there is an optimal way to combine modes and topics, which topics are learned best through which modes? Why do videos really lead to greater feelings of preparedness post training? Do tutors' feelings of preparedness post-training translate into positive feedback from clients? How does Speaking Center training translate into tutors' feelings of preparedness for jobs post center? What topics from training do they use most in their everyday lives at work and in their relationships? How do team building and group cohesion impact the training process? The list of questions related to these training programs is endless, so the first question moving forward is what do we look at first? This study is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to training our tutors.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine (1) if/how these best practices are implemented across the country and (2) evaluate if these best practices create a feeling of preparedness in tutors post-training. Overall, the majority of communication centers incorporate a variety of modes into their training process. It was also found that a combination of modes and coverage of a wide variety of topics lead to greater feelings of preparedness. This could be due to the different learning styles of the tutors in training, but it should be noted that this could also be due to the effectiveness of the training being given. Post training, it was found that tutors most frequently reference topics pertaining to the content and delivery of a presentation when working and that the coverage of those topics were also significantly correlated to tutors' feelings of preparedness

As Persneau-Conway and Romerhausen (2012) state, "the communication center that operates as an extension of the university classroom holds unique possibilities by both assisting students in the more traditional aspects of the learning process while also circumventing many of the traditional barriers posed by the nature of the 'classroom'"(p. 39). The ability to circumvent these traditional barriers begins with the proper training of tutors. While this study just scratches the surface of inquiry into the training of tutors, it is my hope that the results of this study lead to a longer and more involved conversation about how we can train our tutors so that they feel

prepared to best serve our communities. Without trained tutors, our communities would not be properly serviced and students would no longer receive the benefits speaking centers have to give.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A (NACC Tutor Training Certification Application)

Basic Center Information

1. Email

2. Phone

3. Institution

4. Title of center

5. Director of center

6. Number of Years the center has existed

7. Where is the center housed (physically, in terms of institutional structure, and funding (200-300 words)

8. How many staff members work in the center (tutors/consultants and support staff)

9. Has anyone on staff attended either a National Association of Communication Centers conference or a National Communication Association Communication Centers Section session (advisable but not required)?

10. Are there currently staff members who are members of the NCA Communication Centers section (advisable but not required)?

Specific Staff Selection and Training Information

1. Please explain how you select your tutors/consultants (400-500 words)

Training

Please tell us how you initially train your staff

    a. Time-on-task (400-500 words)

b. Modes (400-500 words)

　　c. Topics (400-500 words)

　　　　1. Overview (400-500 words)

　　　　2. Tutoring Expertise (400-500 words)

　　　　3. Communication Instructional Expertise (400-500 words)

　　　　4. Administrative Expertise (400-500 words)

Continuing Evaluation of Tutors

　　1. Please tell us how you work with tutors once they are hired and trained (400-500 words)

　　2. Additional comments for the review committee

　　3. Support documents submitted

APPENDIX B (Survey for Directors)

　　1. Which University do you work at? _____

　　2. What is your title?

　　3. What is the title of your center?

　　4. How long has your center existed?

　　5. How much funding does your center receive?

　　6. How many tutors are currently employed by your Speaking Center?

　　　_____

　　7. How are tutors selected?

　　8. How are tutors compensated for their time and effort?

　　　☐　Stipend/hourly

☐ Class credit

☐ Other (please explain)

9. What kinds of sessions does your center offer? (check all that apply)

☐ One-on-one sessions

☐ Group sessions

☐ Foreign language conversation sessions

☐ Classroom workshops

☐ Other (please explain) _____

10. What resources do your tutors have at their disposal during sessions? (check all that apply)

☐ Computer with internet

☐ Projector

☐ Video camera

☐ Handouts with helpful tips

☐ Feedback forms

☐ Other (please explain)_____

11. What is the current method by which you train tutors? (check all that apply)

☐ Semester-long course

☐ Compressed, intensive workshop before the center opens

☐ Weekly meetings throughout the semester

☐ Observation/shadowing

☐ Selected readings

☐ Videos

☐ Other (please explain) _____

12. How long have you used this current method of training?

13. In your training, how much time is spent doing observation or shadowing?

14. In your training, which of these topics are covered? (check all that apply)

Overview

☐ The role of communication in public life

☐ Mission and needs of the institution & how the center meets those

needs

Tutoring Expertise

☐ Techniques for successfully beginning and ending a session

☐ The ability to set goals for and plan a session

☐ The ability to ask probing questions

☐ Interpersonal communication skills (including listening skills)

☐ An awareness of the role-modeling behavior a tutor enacts

☐ An awareness of the ethics governing a tutoring situation

☐ An awareness of different learning styles and an ability to adapt to

them

Communication Instructional Expertise

☐ The ability to analyze an assignment

☐ The ability to help a student identify an appropriate topic

☐ The ability to help a student generate and research material

☐ An understanding of and the ability to help a student use the resources

of logos, ethos, and pathos

- The ability to help a student organize material effectively and to understand the implications of various organizational patterns

- The ability to help a student develop effective introductions, transitions, and conclusions

- An understanding of what constitutes effective verbal and nonverbal delivery and the ability to help a student identify and address delivery problems

- The ability to help a student use audiovisual resources effectively

- Diagnostic abilities

- An understanding of and the ability to help a student address communication apprehension

- The ability to help a student handle q and a

- An understanding of the differences between individual and group presentations

- An understanding of small group dynamics

- An understanding of interviewing, debating, and other special or discipline-specific communication situations

- An understanding of ESL students' cultural and language difficulties and the ability to work effectively with these students to overcome the difficulties

Administrative Expertise

- Referral abilities (to other academic services as well as counseling services)

- ☐ Emergency procedures

- ☐ Record keeping procedures

- ☐ Mastery of documents, handouts, and technology

15. Are trainees evaluated before officially becoming tutors?

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No

- ☐ If yes, how?

16. Do you continuously evaluate tutors' effectiveness?

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No

- ☐ If yes, how and at what frequency?

APPENDIX C (Survey for Tutors)

1. Which University did you/do you attend?

2. What year are you?

   - ☐ Freshman

   - ☐ Sophomore

   - ☐ Junior

   - ☐ Senior

   - ☐ Graduate Student

   - ☐ Graduated (please state the year you graduated) _____

3. How long did you tutor?

4. What is/was your title at the Center?

5. How much time per week did you spend in the Center?

6. Which of these methods were involved in your training? (check all that apply)

☐ Semester-long course

☐ Compressed, intensive workshop before the center opens

☐ Weekly meetings throughout the semester

☐ Observation/shadowing

☐ Selected readings

☐ Videos

☐ Other (please explain)

7. Which of these topics were involved in your training? (check all that apply)

Overview

☐ The role of communication in public life

☐ Mission and needs of the institution & how the center meets those

needs

Tutoring Expertise

☐ Techniques for successfully beginning and ending a session

☐ The ability to set goals for and plan a session

☐ The ability to ask probing questions

☐ Interpersonal communication skills (including listening skills)

☐ An awareness of the role-modeling behavior a tutor enacts

☐ An awareness of the ethics governing a tutoring situation

☐ An awareness of different learning styles and an ability to adapt to

them

Communication Instructional Expertise

- ☐ The ability to analyze an assignment

- ☐ The ability to help a student identify an appropriate topic

- ☐ The ability to help a student generate and research material

- ☐ An understanding of and the ability to help a student use the resources of logos, ethos, and pathos

- ☐ The ability to help a student organize material effectively and to understand the implications of various organizational patterns

- ☐ The ability to help a student develop effective introductions, transitions, and conclusions

- ☐ An understanding of what constitutes effective verbal and nonverbal delivery and the ability to help a student identify and address delivery problems

- ☐ The ability to help a student use audiovisual resources effectively

- ☐ Diagnostic abilities

- ☐ An understanding of and the ability to help a student address communication apprehension

- ☐ The ability to help a student handle q and a

- ☐ An understanding of the differences between individual and group presentations

- ☐ An understanding of small group dynamics

- ☐ An understanding of interviewing, debating, and other special or discipline-specific communication situations

- An understanding of ESL students' cultural and language difficulties and the ability to work effectively with these students to overcome the difficulties

Administrative Expertise

- Referral abilities (to other academic services as well as counseling services)
- Emergency procedures
- Record keeping procedures
- Mastery of documents, handouts, and technology

8. After training, how prepared did you feel to facilitate a session with a non-native speaker?

   1. Not prepared at all
   2. Not very prepared
   3. Neutral
   4. A little prepared
   5. Very prepared

9. After training, how prepared did you feel to facilitate an organizational session?

   1. Not prepared at all
   2. Not very prepared
   3. Neutral
   4. A little prepared
   5. Very prepared

10. After training, how prepared did you feel to facilitate a session where a speaker

   has high communication apprehension?

   1. Not prepared at all

   2. Not very prepared

   3. Neutral

   4. A little prepared

   5. Very prepared

11. After training, how prepared did you feel to facilitate a session with an

   unwilling client who was required to come to the center?

   1. Not prepared at all

   2. Not very prepared

   3. Neutral

   4. A little prepared

   5. Very prepared

12. After training, how prepared did you feel to facilitate a practice session?

   1. Not prepared at all

   2. Not very prepared

   3. Neutral

   4. A little prepared

   5. Very prepared

13. After training, how prepared did you feel to facilitate a session with a client

   who expects that you, the tutor, to do the work for them?

   1. Not prepared at all

2. Not very prepared

3. Neutral

4. A little prepared

5. Very prepared

14. What made you want to continue tutoring? (check all that apply)

□ Looks good on a resume

□ Class credit

□ Money

□ Friends made through the center

□ Ability to make an impact

□ Other (please explain)

15. Which of these topics do you find yourself referencing most during sessions?

Overview

□ The role of communication in public life

□ Mission and needs of the institution & how the center meets those needs

Tutoring Expertise

□ Techniques for successfully beginning and ending a session

□ The ability to set goals for and plan a session

□ The ability to ask probing questions

□ Interpersonal communication skills (including listening skills)

□ An awareness of the role-modeling behavior a tutor enacts

□ An awareness of the ethics governing a tutoring situation

□ An awareness of different learning styles and an ability to adapt to them

Communication Instructional Expertise

□ The ability to analyze an assignment

□ The ability to help a student identify an appropriate topic

□ The ability to help a student generate and research material

□ An understanding of and the ability to help a student use the resources of logos, ethos, and pathos

□ The ability to help a student organize material effectively and to understand the implications of various organizational patterns

□ The ability to help a student develop effective introductions, transitions, and conclusions

□ An understanding of what constitutes effective verbal and nonverbal delivery and the ability to help a student identify and address delivery problems

□ The ability to help a student use audiovisual resources effectively

□ Diagnostic abilities

□ An understanding of and the ability to help a student address communication apprehension

□ The ability to help a student handle q and a

□ An understanding of the differences between individual and group presentations

□ An understanding of small group dynamics

41

- An understanding of interviewing, debating, and other special or discipline-specific communication situations

- An understanding of ESL students' cultural and language difficulties and the ability to work effectively with these students to overcome the difficulties

Administrative Expertise

- Referral abilities (to other academic services as well as counseling services)

- Emergency procedures

- Record keeping procedures

- Mastery of documents, handouts, and technology

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