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Michael Frizell, MFA
Editor

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Michael is the editor of *The Learning Assistance Review,* NCLCA's peer-reviewed journal. *TLAR* seeks to foster communication among higher education learning center professionals by publishing three annual issues. During the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, he published a collection of essays, *Rising to the Challenge: Navigating COVID-19 as Higher Education Learning Center Leaders*, describing how learning center leaders reacted to campus-wide shutdowns. Michael's commitment to a servant-leadership philosophy is evidenced in his extensive institutional service and commitment to professional organizations for the past 23 years.

His creative work for TidalWave comics consists of creating over one hundred graphic novels about famous musicians, athletes, politicians, and actors while writing several fiction titles. Recent publications include biographies of Dolly Parton, Selena, Pete Buttigieg, Kamala Harris, Stacey Abrams, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and supplements to Netflix's *Tiger King*. His numerous fiction comics include the superhero stories *Ares: Goddess of War*, *The Bold and the Brave*, *Judo Girl*, and *TNT Jackson*. His comics *Stormy Daniels: Space Force* and *The Fantasy World of Bettie Page* feature the authorized likenesses of the actresses. He and his wife, Julia, live in Springfield, Missouri.

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 working in learning assistance at two- and four-year colleges, vocational and technical schools, and universities.

NCLCA's Definition of a Learning Center

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

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Letter from the Editor

Michael Frizell
Missouri State University

The perception that seeking the assistance of a tutor is somehow "less than" isn't isolated to our student body. Administrators and some faculty hear the five-letter word "tutor" and equate it with a four-letter one. Worse, they perceive struggling students as a small population likely to drop out anyway. Such services wouldn't be necessary if we recruited "better" students. Those students are adults, and they think it's time those students learned how to fend for themselves. And if they can't, perhaps college wasn't for them.

Sometimes, the powers that be on campus fail to recognize that even the best students encounter "that class," a class that beats them up and forces them to realize that, while other classes come easy to them, this one won't. They discover they never learned how to study. They also recognize that they never learned how to ask for help. Making a learning center the center of student success initiatives on your campus when everything else seems to take precedence is challenging. Millions for an upgrade to the campus stadium? A donor with deep pockets will build a sign for that stadium that costs more than your learning center's operating budget for a decade. While it's true that a football game could attract more students in one night than the learning center will see in a semester, it's hard to think about that while you're reallocating monies from your meager supplies budget to pay for a tutor to help one struggling student feel supported. For some learning centers, finding a benefactor willing to put their name on the

marquee while paying minimum wage to exceptional students to help others isn't as sexy as a new fountain bearing their name adjacent to the administration building.

I've often wondered if I'm telling the story of our learning center at Missouri State University in a way those resistant to the concept of tutoring can understand. While you and I recognize that tutoring at the college level isn't the same as tutoring in K-12 schools, the stigma remains. I collect quantitative and qualitative data, hurling surveys at the campus community while scouring enrollment and retention reports. I build our results into our messaging, sharing them on social media in unread emails bearing unopened PDFs. I glad-hand administrators and meet with faculty and leaders to discuss our students' needs while asking what the learning center could do for them. Although faculty interest is always high, administrators seem concerned with more expensive ticket items: Upgrades to a crumbling academic building, an unsafe pedestrian walkway, or the retirement of a popular and effective provost or department head.

The enrollment cliff is coming, and it's well past the time to roll up our sleeves and figure out how to keep the students we work hard to enroll here until graduation. It wasn't until MSU included the words "student success" and "retention" in our strategic enrollment plan that I started to see movement - and financial support - for program expansion.

One of the things I didn't understand early in my career as a learning center professional is that campus culture and politics impact policy, dictating who will be in the "room where it happens" (if you may permit me to steal a line from *Hamilton*). Good work and compelling storytelling don't always do the job. Learning center professionals are too often prevented from maximizing their institutional impact because they're not in that room. Finding effective advocates who occupy those chairs becomes paramount. That search can be draining, primarily when it works, and you finally see your budget increase, only to realize that the increase was enough to grow your army of student workers but not for assistance in managing them.

But let's put out one fire at a time.

We must continue telling our stories but remember that our stories are human ones. Want to get into the star chamber? Need to dispel the myth that tutoring is "only for those who can't"? Your story must have a face.

The articles in this issue represent the best articles from the largest submissions I've received in my tenure as editor of this journal. You can feel the writers' passion for their work, and the results speak for themselves. Enjoy.

Michael Frizell, Editor
September 1, 2023

Peer Learning Experiences of Undergraduate Academic Coaches

Katie H. Dufault
Purdue University

Abstract

Research on peer academic coaching is limited and primarily focused on the outcomes of students receiving coaching. However, the peer coach also learns through experience. This qualitative study aims to understand peer academic coaches' perceptions of their coaching roles and experiences. I collected interview and artifact data from three participants. I found the coaches' definitions were congruent with the peer coaching (Blair, 2018) and peer education (Damon & Phelps, 1989) frameworks. Participants' experiences represented both peer tutoring (as a coach) and peer collaboration (among the coaches). Implications include recommendations for peer coaching programs and areas for future research.

Keywords: peer academic coaching; peer learning; academic support; undergraduate students; peer education

Peer Learning Experiences of Undergraduate Academic Coaches

Academic coaching is a relatively new approach to college academic support with minimal but growing research (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Robinson, 2015). Robinson and Gahagan (2010) define academic coaching as the "one-to-one interaction with a student focusing on strengths, goals, study skills, engagement, academic planning, and performance" (p. 27) facilitated through steps of "self-assessment, reflection, and goal setting" (p. 27). Academic coaching has been found to improve student retention, credit completion, and GPA (Alzen, 2021; Capstick et al., 2019; Vanacore & Dahan, 2021), increase students' metacognitive strategies (Howlett et al., 2021), and support students in specific populations such as students with disabilities (Bellman et al., 2015; Fields et al., 2013), historically marginalized students of color (Simmons & Smith, 2020), and students on academic probation (Capstick et al., 2019; Vanacore & Dahan, 2021). Since a majority of programs utilize full-time professionals or graduate students as coaches (Robinson, 2015), the literature specific to undergraduate peer-facilitated coaching is more limited. Additionally, the general academic coaching research has focused on the outcomes of students who received coaching. There is little literature that discusses the outcomes for students who serve as coaches in a peer-facilitated model. The aim of this study is to expand the insight into peer academic coaching from the perspective of the students serving in the coach role.

Literature Review

In 2018, the literature built off more general concepts of academic coaching to specifically discuss peer academic coaching programs. Blair (2018) defined peer-facilitated academic coaching as:

> an on-going, helping relationship in which the coach (a more experienced, trained undergraduate student) works with a client (an undergraduate student) to identify academic and personal goals to practice and strengthen tactics for self-regulated learning, and to elicit positive changes in academic behavior. (pp. 263-264)

This definition for peer coaching reflects the concepts of interaction, self-assessment, reflection, goal setting, and performance emphasized in Robinson and Gahagan's (2010) definition of general academic coaching. It also connects academic coaching to evidence-based approaches of academic support which utilize a *near-peer*, a student leader with training and more, but proximal experience to the student-client. Near-peer support has been found to benefit both the student receiving support and the near-peer paraprofessional providing the support; these benefits include development of academic skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, leadership and teamwork, and interpersonal skills (Astin & Sax, 1998; Dvorak, 2001; Kimaya & Luca, 2013; Micari et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2008; Warner et al., 2018). This approach allows for a shift to peer learning rather than the traditional

learning dynamic of an "expert" teacher working with a student who has different levels of knowledge, skills, and experience (Topping, 2005).

Peer Learning as a Framework

Peer learning is the knowledge and skill development that is achieved when learners of equivalent or near-equivalent experience actively support each other in the learning process (Topping,2005). Students learn not only from receiving support, but also through the process of providing support that is typically absent in the traditional teacher/student dynamic (Topping, 2005). There are many approaches to peer learning, and Damon & Phelps (1989) mapped out peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and peer collaboration as three popular approaches that are distinguished by their levels of on peer equality and mutuality of engagement. The following paragraphs and Table 1 provide a brief overview of each approach according to Damon & Phelps (1989).

A common approach in near-peer academic support, termed "peer tutoring," is on one end of the spectrum. Peer tutoring was categorized as low in peer equality as the facilitating student is in the role due to prior experience and expertise that is greater than the student receiving support, though still less distant than a professional-student dynamic. Peer tutoring also has a range of mutuality of engagement that can fluctuate based on the program, individual students, and educational context. While tutoring,

mentoring, and coaching have similar goals and distinguishable differences as approaches to academic support (see Perez, 2014; Robinson, 2015 for more information), the classification of "peer tutoring" in this context refers to the approach that many forms of academic support can be categorized as rather than referring to tutoring as a specific support.

The next approach is cooperative learning and represents a variety of strategies categorized by a group of students working to complete a task. In cooperative learning, there is relatively high equality among the group members (though there may be differences in content knowledge, social influence, and other factors). Depending on the cooperative learning technique, the mutuality of engagement varies from low to moderate based on the goal of promoting interdependence and the structures for incentivized participation and problem-solving (Damon & Phelps, 1989; Topping 2005).

The last approach Damon & Phelps (1989) categorized is peer collaboration. In peer collaboration, students have high equality as they approach problem-solving from relatively similar levels of knowledge and skills. The mutual engagement is also high, as students go through the problem-solving and learning process together with "mutual discovery, reciprocal feedback, and frequent sharing of ideas" motivating engagement (Damon & Phelps, 1989, p. 13).

The current research base focuses on the outcomes for students receiving coaching. However, learning outcomes go beyond the receiving student in a peer learning framework. The coaching interaction is a shared peer learning experience where all participants, including the coach, are learning from each other and the activity (Whitman, 1988). The research on the outcomes of students receiving coaching investigates only half of the student learning dynamic of a peer-facilitated program. Therefore, the literature needs a more complete understanding of how peer academic coaching contributes to the development and growth of the peer leaders.

While there is research on the influence of serving as a graduate academic coach (Warren, 2019) and similar undergraduate peer leader roles such as peer mentor, peer tutor, peer study facilitator, etc. (see Al kharusi, 2016; Kiyama & Luca, 2013; Dvorak, 2001; Micari et al., 2010), the research on peer academic coaching from a coach's perspective is sparse. Warner et al. (2018) provide a starting point with their research on first-semester peer coach development. They found peer coaches increased both their understanding of the coach role and the program's theoretical model during the first semester (Warner et al., 2018). The literature still does not address how the peer academic coach role compares to the research on the experiences and learning outcomes of similar academic support peer leader roles.

Therefore, further research can extend the literature by exploring how former peer academic coaches perceive the role of a coach and how their experience in the role influenced the undergraduate student leaders' holistic development beyond the initial semester. Specifically, a greater understanding of the influence of a peer coaching role on undergraduate students could inform how academic support professionals recruit, train, and supervise peer academic coaches. Additionally, academic support professionals can utilize research on the contribution of the role to student learning outcomes to secure funding and program support from institutional administration.

Research Questions

Given the limited literature on peer academic coaches' experiences and learning gains, this study intends to build upon the literature on peer academic coaching utilizing the conceptual frameworks of peer learning and Blair's definition of peer coaching. The exploration of the peer academic coaches' perspectives on their role and their learning outcomes will focus on the research questions:

1. How do former peer academic coaches define the role of a peer academic coach?
2. How do former peer academic coaches define coaching?
3. What is the experience of serving as a peer academic coach?

a. What skills do the coaches perceive they gained through the experience?
b. What facilitated or contributed to the coaches' learning?

The research questions are designed so the participants' understanding of their role and coaching more broadly will be explored first to help contextualize the participants' experiences and learning.

Methodology

I utilized a qualitative descriptive (QD) approach to investigate how the peer coach role influenced the participants' development. I selected this approach because it fit with the research goal of understanding participants' lived experiences in their own words and through rich description (Josselson, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative descriptive design was also a good fit for the study as an exploration into a practical setting with little prior research (Doyle et al., 2020). Additionally, QD design allows for flexibility in combining techniques and methods to collect and analyze the data to best address the research questions (Kim et al., 2017). To elicit the rich description needed to answer this study's research questions, I utilized a combination of semi-structured interviews, a visual mapping activity, and artifacts to collect data. I analyzed the data using thematic analysis to support the QD goal of

producing findings that closely reflect the participants' own words and experiences (Doyle et al., 2020; Lambert & Lambert, 2012).

Participants

For the study, I utilized purposive sampling of former coaches from a single peer coaching program at a large, public R-1 institution. Potential participants had to meet the following criteria: served in the peer success coach role starting in fall 2018 or later, coached for at least two semesters, and graduated from the university. The inclusion criteria were informed by the coaching program structure and recommendations in Warner et al. (2018) to identify a participant pool that could best address the research questions.

While recruitment efforts focused on the known population that met these criteria, potential participants confirmed their fit in the interview scheduling process. I recruited an initial four participants through outreach by email and LinkedIn networks; three participants completed the study: Christopher, Lily, and Alyssa. Each participant served in the peer coaching role for a different length of time and brought unique perspectives and strengths to the role. Table 2 shows participant profiles including information on their peer coaching experience, brief background, and descriptions by both the participant and former peers.

For participant confidentiality within a defined population of eligible individuals, I am not able to elaborate further into

individual participants' demographics and identities despite the use of pseudonyms. At the group level, two participants identify as white, and one participant identifies as Black. All participants were domestic students raised in suburban or urban communities in the Midwest.

Coaching Program Context

Participants all served as peer academic coaches at a large, public R-1 institution in the Midwest. The coaching program started in 2014 in a centralized unit that provides academic support for all undergraduate students. While program size and management have evolved each year, the core components of coach training, supervision, and evaluation have been consistent since fall 2018. Coaches are trained on interpersonal communication skills, several coaching models including appreciative advising, learning theories and strategies, and campus-specific resources and policies (see Table 3). Training occurs variety of formats including a pre-semester orientation training, on-going training sessions (one to two sessions a month), peer-led reflection groups, and one-on-one supervision meetings. Evaluations occur each semester and include survey data, formal observations, and self-reflection. Each year two to four experienced peer coaches serve in a leadership role and take on additional responsibilities related to training, coach one-on-ones, peer observations, and programming. While participants' experiences in the coach program varied across several years, all of

participants coached for at least one semester that was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the coaching program shifted to an online format. The program operated in a hybrid format during the 2020-2021 academic year; all trainings were held virtually to accommodate both on-campus and remote coaches. Coaching sessions were held both in-person and virtually depending on the students' locations and preferences.

Data Collection and Analysis

The main source of data was collected through semi-structured interviews with each participant. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because the format is conducive for collecting diverse perspectives across participants and allows for flexibility to follow unanticipated, salient responses from participants (Adams, 2010; Kallio et al., 2016).

The interview protocol was based on open-ended questions and divided across two interviews to allow for participant reflection, follow-up on content after review, and depth without fatigue in the process (Josselson, 2013). The first interview questions covered participants' definitions of the role, coaching more broadly, their early coaching experiences, and transfer of the position to their lives. The second interview questions focused on their development while in the role, program structure, and a reflection activity on their time in the role. For one participant, the second interview was split into two parts resulting in three sessions. Table 4 shows a

sample of interview questions organized by corresponding research question.

Prior to participant interviews, the protocol was piloted with a former coordinator of a peer coaching program and adjusted based on feedback. Given the participants' dispersed locations, interviews were conducted through a video conferencing platform at a time convenient for the participant. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In addition to interview data, two artifacts were collected to allow for triangulation. The second interview included a guided reflection activity which generated a "peaks and valleys" artifact, a visual map of participant's experiences as a peer coach over time. The visual mapping artifact promoted reflection, elaboration, and meaning during the interview, and it became an additional data source for analysis (Josselson, 2013; Striepe, 2021). Participants provided a digital copy of a resume or CV from their most recent application process (job or graduate school). The resumes became an artifact that provided supporting evidence of how the participants made the peer coach position transferable to future experiences and help answer the third research question subpart A: What skills do the coaches perceive they gained through the experience?

After data collection, I conducted a thematic analysis with two levels of coding as structured by Braun & Clarke (2006). During the

initial level of inductive coding, I identified 12 semantic themes (see Table 5). The second level of coding was more deductive as I narrowed and rearranged the 12 themes to address each of the research questions. During both levels of coding, maintaining the participants' language was a priority within the QD design (Doyle et al., 2020; Lambert & Lambert, 2012). In addition to the participants' voice, my theoretical analysis and findings were guided by the conceptual frameworks of Blair's (2018) definition of peer coaching and the spectrum of peer education approaches by Damon & Phelps (1989). For example, the "imperfect role model" theme was pulled directly from a participant's terminology and then aligned as a response to the research question on defining the peer academic coach role and connected to the peer component of Blair's (2018) coaching definition.

During the collection and analysis process, I also compared participants' statements with their visual mapping and resume artifacts. Finally, participants' member-checking supported that the analysis aligned closely with their experiences.

Positionality

I have been part of the peer academic coaching program that is explored in this study as a learning center professional since the program was established. I assisted in forming the program, guide program decisions which include peer coach hiring, and assess the program annually. I have not served as a direct supervisor to the

peer coaches, but I have varying levels of rapport and relationships with the former peer coaches who qualified to be participants. My familiarity with the program, the coaches' role, and the coaches themselves helped me develop appropriate and informed questions for the semi-structured interviews.

As a learning center administrator, one of my goals for the program and center is that the student leadership opportunities are developmental and transformative experiences rather than a one-way, transactional job. My staff and I invest in our student leaders through training, feedback, and mentorship. My research questions and interest stem from this goal and a curiosity to know if our positions achieve that goal. The data collected for this study will help inform how program leadership design and implement peer academic coach hiring, training, and professional development in evidence-based ways. I am mindful that I have a bias to think the position does promote holistic development of the peer academic coaches, and I know finding the genuine answer is in the best interest of program improvement.

Research Trustworthiness

I engaged in several strategies to aid in trustworthiness. Throughout the study, I maintained an audit trail documenting methodological decisions and progress, interview observations and responses, analysis procedures, and on-going reflexivity (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993; Tracy, 2010). I embedded several strategies to aid

with credibility within the study design. I collected multiple sources of data through both interviews and artifacts with the goal of producing rich description and triangulation of the interview data, peaks-and-valley artifact, and resume/CV artifact. Participants engaged in member checking of preliminary findings as part of the last interview protocol (Tracy, 2010). Throughout the research process, I worked with a research mentor as a peer reviewer and debriefer. All of these efforts supported the goal of being able to contribute meaningful and trustworthy knowledge to the literature on academic support and peer academic coaching (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question seeks to gain insight into how participants perceived their role as the first step in understanding their peer academic coach experience. How do former peer academic coaches define the role of a peer academic coach?

An "Imperfect" Role Model

When participants talked about the peer academic coach role, their reflections frequently highlighted the nature of the peer or near-peer component. Lily described peer coaches as:

> *…we're like imperfect role models, we're just people who have figure[d] out a way that works for us and we're helping them figure out the way*

that works for them…I would say "it's also a learning piece because this might help you out and if not, we'll figure something else out."

As an imperfect role model, the peer academic coach brings authentic experiences, both the good and the bad, to the relationship to help in the learning and solution-finding process of coaching. The focus on being authentic continued as coaches described the need to use the strategies and resources they shared with students in their own personal and academic lives. Christopher shared on this concept several times, saying:

[I]t was a good way to keep myself accountable…I figured that if I was in a position where I have to be able to look at other people, those concepts it seems to go back to… it would be hypocritical…to not also continuously work on those skills for myself.

I used a lot of growth mindset resources throughout my training, like throughout my sessions as a [coach]. But then also… it was one of those things that I couldn't talk to my students about it without making sure that I had the same kind of thing installed in myself.

'Cause…you cannot be in a position as a [coach] without upholding the learnings, the resources, and everything else that's engaged within the program. You need to be able to exhibit those features yourself.

For Christopher, the need to be authentic is related to being accountable in the coaching relationship and the responsibilities of the role model component. He was driven by the need to lead by

example, continuing to improve on the skills and strategies being shared with coachees, and to be authentic in referrals.

Alyssa also talked about the importance of making referrals not only from research-based strategies but with personal experience, either from herself or other coaches.

I could research as many strategies as I want, but there's no first person experience I could touch on and be like, "…I know it's worked for me. It's possible it could work for you." But being able to go to someone that's had that experience and knows what it's like… knowing that it's added value to someone and has been proven to assist and being able to provide that was fantastic.

The value of speaking from personal experience supports the research on near-peer support and the influence it has on undergraduate students' learning. The recommendation comes not from a university authority but rather someone who shares a similar experience as a current student.

The Coach is a Conversation Guide

In addition to seeing themselves as "imperfect role models," participants often described their coach role as a "conversation guide." However, they also discussed the process of developing the skill of guiding conversations rather than it being a skill they brought to the role.

Christopher shared, "I took away a lot of how to guide a conversation." He later expanded on what it meant to guide a conversation.

> *I believe as a result of the position I learned that I had a tendency to always want to jump out and speak my answer…when it comes to me wanting to share, ' Hey, I enjoy X, Y and Z. You should look into it. You should see what it's all about.' I think that translated into when I would have meetings, I'm listening to a student detail to me whatever they're being challenged by… [or] tackling head-on at the moment. I often have an idea in my head of trying to put all the puzzle pieces together. It's 'This is what's going on, this is what could be helpful, and this is the way that we could implement it.' And I always want to just spew it out right away. And over time, you've learned that you've [got] to listen to listen, not listen to speak, and I think that's something that I learned about myself throughout that process.*

Lily described a similar process of learning to guide conversations.

> *[I was] almost prescriptive… like, 'okay, like you're having trouble with this, we're gonna do this.' … I was approaching it from like a very like doctor-esque perspective of 'you have a problem and I wanna treat it.' But I think … after getting some feedback and stuff from [my supervisor], I… [saw it as] more of 'I guide the conversation, but I don't lead the conversation.' So I would definitely say that in the beginning…I thought it needed to be super structured, but I eventually… let them kind of lead it.*

After gaining more experience, Lily "…came prepared with questions instead of coming prepared, coming prepared with like solutions." The shift away from sharing a right solution to facilitating reflection and solution-finding was a core piece of how the participants described becoming a conversation guide.

Even in defining the role, the participants spoke about their development both in the role and personally. A peer academic coach models using strategies and resources while continuously strengthening their own skills. A coach also learns to listen and facilitate conversation and decision-making rather than prescribing predetermined solutions.

Research Question 2

Building on the first, the second research question extends to gain insight into how participants viewed coaching more broadly. How do former peer academic coaches define coaching?

Coaching is a Helping Relationship

Mirroring aspects of Blair's (2018) definition of peer coaching, the participants saw coaching as a relationship focused on growth in skills and performance. Christopher said, "Coaching is a relationship," and later elaborated on his definition of coaching as:

> *…the action of being coached towards a goal of some sort, which might be created by the individual or by both parties: the coach and coachee. But more specifically…the advancement of a skill…and performance.*

Lily shared that family and friends often mistook her role as being a tutor. She clarified that while the roles were similar "we're not a tutor and we're trying to get them help. We're tutoring them on how to get help."

Alyssa had similar experiences that emphasized both the relationship and challenge of explaining the role to people outside of the program and campus environment.

> *…what first comes to mind is I just think about like the students I work with and there's definitely some of them that left a pretty good lasting impact and I felt like I had a really good experience with and grew a lot from being with them. So I know for most people if they don't know what the program is, …their perception of it would be different, but I go straight to thinking about my experiences and the people I worked with there.*

Focus on Strategies, not Advice

In comparing a mentoring experience to his coaching experience, Christopher reflected mentoring was:

> *[m]ore advice than resources... 'I would do this in this situation. I would recommend this to you,' versus like in coaching, I would say, 'Well, we have options. Here's what these options are. What sounds appealing to you? What have you tried before in the past?' And identifying that way.*

His experience emphasizes that coaching is about providing coachees with strategy options and the role of decision-maker. The

process focuses on getting the coachee to their end goal in a way that works best for their situation and life; not about reaching the same end goal as the mentor and using their wisdom and experience to navigate similar challenges. This mirrors the participants' view of the coach being a conversation guide with questions and options rather than solutions and advice.

In Lily's experience, finding the right strategies also allowed for collaboration. She recalled a coaching conversation she had where she mirrored the student's language and used "we" to foster a collaborative tone:

> *So I was like, "Look, we gotta figure a solution that works for you…in terms of managing your time that way you're not like having a 'freak out' every time you have a project that's due..."*

In addition to providing strategies and options, Alyssa emphasized the importance of tailoring those strategies to the individual.

> *I was pretty confident who I was working with and the strategies that I was providing them. Just making sure that I was customizing the program that would be best for them and making sure that they were successful at the end of the day.*

Participants' definitions highlight that coaching is both a relationship and a process. The relationship serves as a conduit for support. The process is a personalized one, not limited to the solutions or path that worked for the coach. Similar to the role of guiding a conversation, the coaching process is based on

collaborative goal setting, providing options of strategies, and supporting the coachee as the decision-maker.

Research Question 3

Participants' perceptions of the peer role and coaching offers a necessary context for the larger research question: What is the learning experience of a peer coach?

A: What skills do the coaches perceive they gained through the experience?

B: What facilitated or contributed to the coaches' learning?

Learning through Experience over Time

Each participant mentioned that the role of a peer coach involved a learning curve within the first semester. Participants mentioned worries and uncertainty in their coaching ability early in training and the role. Alyssa reflected on her experience during the visual mapping activity and shared how she went from "super worried" to feeling more confident in the role over time. "I felt I had a good routine going. I was able to walk in with each student, I was ready to go." Alyssa also reflected on the learning experience as a senior and only being able to serve in the role for one year:

> *It's too bad that I have my one semester of trial and trying to figure it out and see what's going on, and then then it's over, and so the next semester I just have one semester where I'm a confident, clear PSC and know what I'm doing.*

Christopher's debrief of the visual mapping activity also emphasized the learning that occurs in the role with each year.

> *After that first year of being in the program, it kind of clicked for me. "Okay, I get how this works. I know where I could do better as a coach…" [T]hings had started to fall into place then at that time as well. As I started to learn more about myself and how to show up better as a coach for my coachees and the program itself.*

When asked to mark where he felt he had the most growth and learning, he identified the end of each academic year. "…each year marked a milestone for me and my coaching... and the personal development." In his elaboration, Christopher mentioned refining skills, that each year he was able to "innovate and iterate on those experiences."

Learning from Coaching

The participants acknowledged that the role of a peer coach involves providing one-way or unequal support. For the coaches, the unequal dynamic meant "being friendly but not friends," and "maintaining boundaries." Alyssa contrasted the dynamic with the two-way dynamic of a friendship:

> *With friendships, [it's] them talking about their problems to you… [there's] an opportunity down the line where you'll talk about your problems to them. In the PSC program it's one way, you're never gonna dump your problems on your coachees… and I don't think I ever*

had a student that would be like, "…here's a strategy that I use, you should use it too."

Despite the one-way dynamic, Alyssa also shared, "you also need to understand that like you're helping yourself as you go through" the role of a coach. "I applied a lot of the skillsets that we were learning within the program within like my personal life."

In addition to learning as the coach, participants spoke about one-on-one meetings with their supervisors as supporting their development both in and beyond the role. Participants saw the supervisors as someone who was invested in them and could provide feedback, help navigating challenging situations, and resources. While not explicitly stated, their supervisors' approach allowed participants to experience and learn from coaching as the recipient.

Learning Gains

As previously mentioned, participants frequently discussed the need to personally utilize the strategies and resources they shared with their students. The participants also identified other skills and outcomes they learned through the role. Sometimes the coach's development was a surprise to them, as illustrated by Alyssa's comment, "I was never as focused on the development that I would go through and the growth that I would handle" in the role.

A broad outcome mentioned by participants was "leadership skills." The participants frequently referenced the role as a

leadership position, including on their resumes or application materials. Christopher shared, "I also learned that, just in general, I'm capable of being a leader…I have the capacity to do something." When asked to elaborate on the general idea of leadership, participants mentioned active listening skills, problem-solving skills, questioning skills, vulnerability, and communication skills. At times, Christopher used "communication skills" and "coaching skills" interchangeably as he saw that as a core piece to the role and working with others.

A specific communication skill identified by Lily was the ability to facilitate difficult conversations. She shared an example of using skills from coaching when having difficult conversations at work, including asking an employee about a situation using open-ended questions and navigating the outcome of the interaction.

So I have to have conversation with his manager, and instead of being like anxious for this conversation, … it's made me a lot more prepared for difficult conversations…If you told me four or five years ago that I would have to have a difficult conversation with a pretty high-up manager, as a pretty new employee, I think I would be absolutely freaking out right now.

In another example, Lily talked about a conversation of setting expectations with an outside contractor, comparing it to the expectation setting conversations in a coaching session, saying, "I know you didn't have clear expectations, but now we're gonna set

some and I expect you to meet these and I'll be checking on that from time to time." Lily concluded with "I think it overall, it helps me be honest and upfront during conversations while still having tact and being able to communicate the difficult aspects of the conversation."

Participants also saw presentation skills as part of leadership and communication gains. Christopher reflected on the opportunity to present workshops to the general student body as well as leading some training sessions.

> *And I thought that was incredibly dope because not only is that beneficial to the general student body, if they can come to those workshop sessions, but it does give leaders that opportunity for professional development, both in quite literally a leadership role as you're giving that presentation ... talk[ing] to a group of students. But also reaffirming your ability and … understanding of that topic and kind of doubling down there.*

Alyssa also shared a highlight of co-presenting with a peer during a conference-style training during the visual mapping activity. "And then the winter training, [Ellie] and I had done a presentation together, so that was a lot of fun to do. It felt really productive, and it was nice to lecture on a topic we were passionate about."

Learning from Fellow Coaches

The peer coach-to-student interaction is a defining aspect of peer coaching; the participants emphasized the peer learning that occurred in their interactions with other peer coaches. Christopher noted that peer coaches are in the role because they "want to engage with other students in general, not just in a [coaching] capacity. And I think that because of that, it helped in building relations amongst each other, and for myself."

Early in the peer coaching program and Christopher's experience, staff-facilitated trainings were the main source of interaction among the peer coaches. When asked about what helped him grow in the role as a new coach, Christopher responded the "first thing immediately came to my mind, believe it or not, is the small five minutes or so, five, 10 minutes before" training sessions. During his time as a peer coach, the program shifted to add reflection groups, a peer-led session for coaches to connect, problem-solve, and build community on their own. Christopher elaborated on the value he saw from this shift.

> *...specifically, it addressed… us being able to converse with each other more. Which helped in the flow of knowledge and just thought process through us as peer success coaches and the jobs that we had to do. So, when then it came to later in like my [peer coach] experience, that we would have the group meetings individually when there would be no*

staff or faculty present. I think that those meetings would end up being a lot more effective.

Both Lily and Alyssa became peer coaches after the implementation of reflection groups. They had similar positive impressions and used the groups to help with collaborative problem solving and gaining feedback. Alyssa shared the opportunity to get and give feedback "especially helped [in] new situations that I didn't really know how to go through, or things that were outside of my comfort zone and how to navigate through that." Similarly, Lily mentioned the ability to "talk through issues" together. She explained further that "when you're talking to another coach, I think that you're… able to approach the same concept, but from different perspectives." During a different interview, Lily also went through and identified several specific strengths of her closest group of peers and how each contributed their strengths to the reflection group. The unique contributions and perspectives based on strengths illustrate the group's collaborative nature with high equality and high mutual engagement.

The community formed by the peer coaches was described as "always good energy," "a high point in my day," and an opportunity to connect with students outside of their majors or disciplines. Mutual trust was also mentioned as a key component of the community. Christopher summarized the peer community with this statement:

I know that both inside and outside of our individual meetings with [coachees], I would trust pretty much the majority of people who came through the program. … I would know that they're capable of doing so. Because we were all building communication skills by interacting with each other, by doing the different activities and the trainings together. I appreciate the social component of it.

Overall, findings support that participants viewed their peer academic coaching experience as a learning experience. This is best summarized by Lily's advice to current students interested in applying to be a peer coach. "I would say it's a really fun job and it's a really good leadership and development activity, or a development experience for not only your resume, but also for… skills that you're going to need throughout your life." At another time, Lily also reflected "…honestly if I hadn't been a [peer academic coach], my college experience would've been a lot less enriching overall."

Discussion

The findings show that participants saw the role, coaching, and their overall peer academic coach experience to be an enriching learning experience. Participants defined the peer coach role and coaching as "imperfect role models" who guide conversations that occur in a helping relationship focused on strategies, mirroring many aspects of Blair's (2018) definition. Part of that definition helped distinguish peer coaching from similar peer roles in tutoring

and mentoring. Unlike a tutor, the peer coach is not focused on a subject matter but rather the process of studying and learning. Unlike a mentor, the coach focuses on strategies rather than personal advice. Similar to Warner et al. (2018), the findings support that new peer academic coaches grow in the role and their understanding of coaching within the first semester. The current findings also expand the timeframe of coach growth in the role as participants felt their growth continued after the learning curve of the initial semester. Participants expressed personal, positional, and professional growth throughout their time as a coach, regardless of their length of service. There was consistent alignment between the participants' identified peaks and valleys and their coach experiences, especially in the growth in confidence and skills over time in the role. This growth was also reflected in participants' resumes; the participants who had served in the position longer highlighted the role and listed more transferrable details. One participant's position listing focused on the transferrable communication skills, consistent with his frequent use of "coaching skills" and "communication skills" interchangeably in the interviews.

The peer coaches also described benefits of peer learning, including true peer collaboration and near-peer "tutoring." Their descriptions of peer coaching confirmed the alignment with Damon & Phelp's (1989) term of "peer tutoring" characterized by low

equality and provided more insight into the varying levels of mutual engagement. For example, several participants commented on the experience of "being ghosted" when the student they were coaching suddenly became unresponsive to outreach. Participants also shared contrasting experiences of high levels of mutual engagement such as cocreating plans and executing accountability steps. This confirms a peer tutoring approach classification and suggests that over the last three decades the term "peer tutoring" within the framework may be more reflective of a variety of near-peer academic roles with low equality and varying mutual engagement, similar to the variety of techniques that fall into the collaborative learning approach. As the facilitator in the peer coaching environment, coaches learn through experiences of presenting information, applying listening and questioning skills, and "taking their own advice." They found that these skills transferred to post-college experiences in having difficult conversations and leading groups toward a goal.

The description of participants' interactions with other peer coaches aligned with the peer collaboration approach (Damon & Phelps, 1989) as well as mirrored some models of a community of practice (Cox, 2005). As a community of peer coaches, participants gained valuable insight into similar skills such as rapport building, strategy refinement, resource knowledge, and mutual support. Both peer tutoring and peer collaboration approaches gave coaches a

greater understanding of diversity in experiences and academic disciplines.

Outside of the peer learning context, coaches also experienced support from the non-power role of supervisee to supervisor. Supervisor support was often discussed in ways that mirror the role of a coach- providing feedback, strategies, and resources; showing genuine care; active listening and questioning (Blair, 2018; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). While not explicitly stated by participants, the actions of the supervisors served as a model of coaching that allowed the participants to experience the coaching relationship from the other "side."

Implications for Practitioners

The findings of this study are most beneficial to practitioners in academic support who manage peer coaching programs. The more that is learned about the perspective of the peer coaches and their development, the more refined training, supervision, and program structure can be to foster the peer coaches' learning outcome. Based on the findings, practitioners are encouraged to incorporate peer coach-to-coach learning opportunities into the program design and role expectations. The peer coach role is often executed individually, but the student leaders highly valued the benefits of coach-to-coach conversations and problem-solving. Practitioners can build collaborative learning activities within existing training components and consider establishing small groups for reflections, bonding, and

problem-solving without professional staff facilitators. Practitioners may also want to utilize literature on community of practice models to guide program structure, allowing for member integration, knowledge sharing, and other benefits of such an approach (Cox, 2005). Programs should invest time in community building and peer connections early in the semester given this was often when new coaches experienced the most uncertainty in their coaching ability and role. A strong community within a coaching program may also help with coach retention, similar to findings within peer mentoring and peer tutoring contexts (Oliver et al., 2020; White, 2014). Coach retention is important as experience in the role and developing a "coaching style" was found to take time. The coaches all reported feeling more confident and being a "better coach" after a semester, and coaches in the role for several years still reported growth as a coach each subsequent year.

While research and assessment on peer coaching programs has largely focused on the outcomes of the students receiving coaching, practitioners can also maximize program reporting and funding requests by documenting the peer learning that occurs for all students involved in the coaching.

Limitations

By design, the study focused on experiences of former peer coaches from a single program. One limitation is that the current study did not allow for deep exploration of how participants'

identities informed and influenced their experience as coaches. Future research into the peer coaching position from a critical lens is needed and would contribute to equity-minded program structures, implementation, and assessment (McNair et al., 2020). Another limitation is that all participants had a positive experience as a coach and were invested in the program. All eligible former coaches were contacted about the opportunity to participate; however, in the future having an incentive beyond contributing to research and program understanding could expand the participant pool. The current study provided insight into the experiences of coaches who had positive experiences that led to personal investment. Future studies may want to intentionally recruit and study the experience of former coaches who did not choose to continue in the role or were otherwise disengaged. One potentially limiting aspect to the study is based on the timing context. The participants' time serving as peer coaches included two to three semesters of pandemic-impacted programming. Elements of the program structure, including training and coaching sessions, changed frequently in response to evolving campus regulations. All training sessions were virtual, and coaching sessions varied between virtual and in-person with masks. While program elements shifted and peer coaching will not always occur in a pandemic context, the need to adapt to changing contexts will continue to be part of higher education and peer coaching programs to some extent. The pandemic setting also

highlighted the importance of connections among peer coaches in each participants' experience. This is consistent with findings that sense of community and social support, especially for adolescents, was positively associated with wellbeing and adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic, including mitigating perceived negative impacts and challenging situations (Campione-Barr et al., 2021; Mannarini et al., 2022).

Areas for Future Research

Peer academic coaching, and more specifically the outcomes of peer academic coaches, has many opportunities for further research. Research can expand on the experiences of peer coaches based on sociocultural identities as well as the experiences of peer coaches who opted not to continue in the role. In addition to qualitative methods, quantitative research is also needed and often seen as more persuasive to institutional administrators. Future research can assess peer coaches' growth on identified and measurable competencies over time as a coach. Based on coach comments, cultural competency is worth studying.

In addition to the learning outcomes of peer coaches, understanding the training and supervision structures that best support the student/coach learning is important. Each participant identified at least one challenging situation they experienced as a coach. Research practitioners can explore if different training methods and learning activities are more effective at preparing peer

coaches to navigate challenging situations, including the transfer of skill from training to actual coaching situations and beyond the role. Researchers could also examine the collaborative peer learning that occurs among the coaches using a community of practice framework (see Cox, 2005 for more information).

Lastly, future research could also expand into learning center professionals who are responsible for the training and supervision of peer coaching programs. Learning center professionals are often designers-by-assignment from a variety of academic backgrounds. Using an action research design, researchers could study professionals' current knowledge, skills, and attitudes about theory-grounded training. The findings could be used as a learner analysis for developing trainings on peer learning, social constructivist and situated learning pedagogy, and instructional design models. Researchers could assess the training participants' direct outcomes as well as the indirect influence on the participants' peer coaching program.

Conclusion

As a relatively new and growing form of academic support, the literature on peer academic coaching has primarily focused on the outcomes of students receiving coaching. Given the peer learning dynamics of the position, the experience of serving as a peer coach can also be a learning opportunity. This study contributes to the literature by providing insight into the experiences of former

academic peer coaches. Findings show that coach-derived definitions of the peer coach role and coaching match the definitions of the literature. Additionally, coaches experience a range of learning outcomes which transfer into their post-graduation life. Finally, coaches benefitted from multiple aspects of Damon & Phelps's (1989) spectrum of peer education. Participants mentioned growth through serving as a coach (peer tutoring) and as part of the community of peer coaches (peer collaboration). Their supervisors also provided scaffolding of what a coaching relationship feels like for the coachee. Implications of this study are aimed at practitioners who manage or are looking to create a peer academic coaching program and include recommendations for training activities and structure to promote the peer collaborative learning among peer coaches. As peer coaching becomes a more established approach to academic support, research on each facet of peer coaching programs needs to be conducted to understand outcomes and effectiveness which includes continuing our understanding of how serving as a peer coach provides students with experiential education.

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Appendix

Table 1

Analysis Themes by Round of Coding

First Round of Coding Themes	Second Round of Coding by Research Question
1. "Imperfect role model" Ex: experiences as student, personal struggles and successes as student, peer leader	**RQ 1** "Imperfect role model" Imperfect role model Authentic and accountable as a coach Resources Conversation guide Coaching definitions/comparison Adapting Rewards as a coach
2. Authentic and accountable as a coach Ex: credibility, personal application, own growth	
3. Coaching definitions/comparisons Ex: guiding conversation, asking questions, active listening, rapport building, athlete and goals	**RQ 2** Helping Relationship Coaching definitions/comparison Rewards as a coach Focus on Strategies, not advice Coaching definitions/comparison Resources Adapting
4. Resources Ex: Strategies, handouts, tools, theories, mindsets	
5. Community of coaches Ex: reflection groups, trainings, socials, sharing/asking for advice, mutual trust and respect	**RQ 3** Learning through experience/time in role Adapting Rewards Challenges Outcomes beyond role Learning through relationships 2 Way Interactions Community of coaches Rewards Program feedback Outcomes beyond role 1 Way interactions Coaching
6. Difficult conversations Ex: with coachees, transfer to personal life, mental health, boundary-setting, holding others accountable, communication	
7. Supervisor Support	
8. Program Feedback	

Ex: training topics, future advice to new coaches, observations, structure

9. Adapting

Ex: tailoring to coachees, tailoring to tasks, COVID, general changes, evolution of coaching approach

10. Rewards as a coach/Affective positive

11. Challenges as a coach/Affective negative

12. Outcomes beyond role

Ex: empathy, diversity, leadership, confidence, problem-solving, openness to seeking coaching post-graduation

Coaching definitions/comparisons
Challenges
Accountable and authentic
Supervisor support
Learning Outcomes/gains
Authentic and accountable
Outcomes beyond role
Difficult conversations

Intentional Tutoring: Fulfilling the UDL Promise for Historically Marginalized Students

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Abstract

This essay recommends embedded tutoring as a strategy for the Universal Design for Learning Framework. Embedded tutoring embodies many metacognitive and academic self-regulatory processes suggested by the UDL framework into one specific vehicle and disrupts the inherent classroom power dynamic. Utilizing Brookfield's critical lens, we trace the history of how systemic injustice creates inherent barriers to student learning in higher education and how well-meaning faculty can reinforce these barriers. We then explore how UDL seeks equality for all but excludes underserved students and fails to address these barriers to learning. Finally, the essay recommends a best practice of embedded tutoring and how this can fulfill UDL's promise to achieve a greater level of equity in the university classroom for all students, including historically marginalized populations.

Keywords: tutoring, UDL, systemic racism, higher education, critical reflection, embedded tutoring

Intentional Tutoring: Fulfilling the UDL Promise for Historically Marginalized Students

The current system of pedagogical practice in higher education is racist--but it doesn't have to be (Love, 2019). This essay explores how and why students from marginalized communities experience the higher education classroom as inherently unequal and unjust. Then, utilizing Brookfield's (2002, 2017) critical lenses, we critique how even well-researched and well-intentioned instructional frameworks such as UDL, which aim to create change "to help make teaching and learning inclusive and transformative for everyone" ultimately fail students from marginalized communities (CAST, 2021). Finally, we recommend broadening the UDL guidelines to include classroom power dynamics. Embedded tutoring offers an effective method to not only address these dynamics, but also to fully realize the UDL promise.

Systemic Injustice and Higher Education

In order to understand how marginalized students experience the higher education classroom, we must first take an unflinching look at the ways the education infrastructure as a

whole systematically disadvantages students from historically marginalized communities (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Because of the history of relentless economic inequality starting with the Middle Passage and continuing through redlining and beyond, many Black and Latinx students in the United States still live in under-resourced K-12 school districts (Edbuild, 2019.) Though the past half century has seen great progress in terms of academia validating the cultural contributions of underrepresented groups, with Latinx Studies departments and African American Studies departments cropping up in well-respected universities around the country, understanding and supporting the unique needs of underserved student populations still eludes even the best-intentioned academic administrations as graduation rates continue to lag (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Meritocracy is as much a fantasy as it ever was.

The economic inequality that Black and Latinx families face has very real implications for the academic success of many students of color. By some metrics, the average Black student is two grade levels behind their white peers by the time they reach high school (Reardon et al., 2019). Black and Latinx students face implicit biases, cultural differences, and impediments to their success even within the same schools as their white peers (Blaisdell, 2016; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Students of color experience more severe punishments at

school than their white peers for similar infractions (ACLU, 2021; Tripplett et al., 2014). Black and Latinx students are less likely to persist to college and often arrive academically underprepared (Hussar et al., 2020).

These facts about racist educational infrastructure are not shocking. Faculty are aware of the way the school-to-prison pipeline punishes students of color more severely than their white peers and puts barriers in the way of Black and Latinx students (Nance, 2018). Black students in particular often have to deal with generational trauma, and micro-aggressions and stereotype threat put pressure on students of color to live up to impossible standards in the classroom, never letting down their guard in front of white peers and instructors (Nguyen & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Nguyen, 2017; Steele et al., 2002). These dynamics create yet another barrier to learning. What is often unaddressed is how students' historical experience in K-12 classrooms shape and affect their understanding of the higher education classroom. The system of education is structured in ways that perpetuate hierarchy and preserve the unjust status quo (Blaisdell, 2016; Calarco, 2011), and this continues into the college classroom.

Despite the focus in recent years on increasing college access for students from underserved backgrounds, Black

and Latinx students are still underrepresented in higher education. While they are 13.4% of the overall population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), Black students only made up 7.9% of undergraduate students nationally as of 2019 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019)–and this number includes HBCUs, which are around 75% Black students (American Council on Education). A Black student walking into a college classroom is likely to see fewer people who look like them than they are used to. While Latinx students are not as disproportionately underrepresented as Black students (Latinx students make up 21% of undergraduate students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019) and the overall population in the United States is 18.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)), they still face significant barriers to academic success in college, which are demonstrated in the markedly different graduation rates between Latinx students and their white counterparts. For the cohort beginning in 2014, 64.5% of white students graduated from 4-year colleges within a 6-year timeframe, while 53.1% of Latinx students graduated in that timeframe, and 40.6% of Black students graduated in that timeframe (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Despite the myth of meritocracy, higher education is clearly perpetuating systems of inequality.

Brookfield's Critical Lenses

This systemic injustice is perpetuated in higher education classrooms, often by well-meaning faculty. Brookfield (2002) identifies four critically reflective lenses for faculty use to deepen their ability to do meaningful work in a classroom. Critically reflecting on pedagogical practice from each lens helps uncover assumptions, make more informed decisions, and create better teaching practices. Brookfields' critical lenses include personal or autobiographical experiences, student, colleagues, and theoretical literature. While Brookfield (2002, 2017) advocates critical reflection on a personal level, applying each lens to individually craft better practice, it is possible to apply these lenses to instructional methods and tools. Faculty tend to select teaching tools and methods according to their own autobiographical lens, reacting to past experiences by either replicating that which worked well for them, or shifting away from past negative experiences (Brookfield, 2017). This most often leads to replication, after all, current faculty are those who thrived and succeeded in the current system. Faculty regularly evaluate and select from an ever-increasing array of pedagogical approaches to improve their teaching practice, but many are unintentionally racist.

For example, one popular recommendation is for faculty

to connect with their students by ensuring students feel that they are cared about, and they matter. While research does support these approaches (Miller & Mills, 2019; Pychl et al., 2021), these methods are colorblind, and thus they ignore the classroom dynamics from the perspective of the student from underserved demographics. Faculty–especially white instructors–fail to view these instructional methods and recommendations from the critical lens of a student. This lack of understanding privileges instructors' own autobiographical and personal lenses and ignores both the past societal pressure exerted in underserved K-12 school districts to behave rather than to learn. In addition, this fails to address the inherent teacher-student power dynamic present in any university classroom.

To improve student academic success and improve retention, learning support professionals must account for their student demographics and commit to critically reflecting upon the classroom experience from the student point of view – not from an autobiographical lens. At this point in history, creating learning environments and providing learning assistance without acknowledging racial and socioeconomic injustice demonstrates an unexamined privilege in understanding learning and instruction, and it demonstrates a failure to address the racial and economic privilege inherent in our educational infrastructure. Building

learning environments that do not create opportunities for equity and inclusion ignores and passively reinforces systemic and systematic racial and socio-economic injustice in learning. As learning assistance professionals committed to social justice, we have a responsibility to apply a critically reflective student lens, to raise these issues, and to make recommendations for improvement.

The Instructor-Student Power Imbalance

Viewing the higher education classroom from a critically reflective student lens changes the understanding of effective pedagogical approaches. The very structure of the teacher-student classroom dynamic perpetuates a dysfunctional system of power and oppression that creates further barriers for students from historically marginalized populations (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Even the most innovative and approachable instructors are still authority figures charged with the responsibility and power to pass or fail students (French & Raven, 1959; Schrodt et al., 2007). With the ability to fail or dismiss students comes a barrier to authentically connecting with students. This problem is often more pronounced when white instructors try to connect with Black and Latinx students, who do not see themselves represented among those who have power and authority in the educational system (McHugh et al., 2013). How can learning assistance professionals best support learning

given this system?

To learn, students should feel free to make mistakes without fearing that they might damage the instructor's images of them or their grades, yet the education system forces this inherently problematic teacher-student dynamic, which is counterproductive to the learning process. Instructors must grade student work, passing judgment on their aptitude and abilities. Students feel pressure to impress their teachers and are uncomfortable reaching out to instructors when they struggle with a concept (Jack, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2016). Unfortunately, even when instructors are aware of this challenge to connecting with students, there is a limit to how much authority figures can disrupt the dysfunctional power dynamic that has been forced upon their students throughout the students' educational journeys (Hyland, 2005). The power dynamic of the education system rewards obedience and self-censorship more than learning in many contexts, and students learn not to question systems of oppression. As a result of the school to prison pipeline and the increased severity of repercussions for non-compliance, Black and Latinx students are rewarded for compliance. By the time they reach higher education, this dynamic is entrenched as education, learning, and success. Undergraduate students arrive in the higher education

classroom understanding that compliance, more so than learning, matters.

Students from marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by this power imbalance. Faculty are human and flawed, each with their own inherent biases (Redding, 2019). In the worst of situations, racially biased instructors are overtly dismissive of the needs of students of color in the classroom (Hyland, 2005). Inevitably, implicit bias comes into play (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007; Zimmerman & Kao, 2019). Students are aware of these biases, and thus they often feel compelled to hide their mistakes or confusion from the instructor (Calarco, 2011; Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Even when instructors do their best to create accessible material and to create anti-racist environments within their classes, stereotype threat often leads students from underrepresented communities to hesitate before asking for help from instructors for fear that they will be judged harshly by white and affluent peers (Richards, 2020). This barrier to asking questions and seeking help is a significant barrier to learning, one that is disproportionately imposed upon Black and Latinx students as a result of their K-12 classroom experience in an education system which is unjust.

Unequal preparation of students, implicitly biased

teachers, stereotype threat, and the teacher-student power dynamic itself all shape students prior to their arrival in a college or university classroom. All too often higher education institutions believe they are giving Black and Latinx students the same opportunities that they give white students just by simply admitting them to the same classes, but when institutions disregard barriers to learning, they inadvertently set students up for failure. The traditional hierarchy of the classroom is not conducive to learning for all students, and that hierarchy needs to be disrupted. Simply providing access to the classroom for all students does not mean all students have equal opportunity to learn. Rather than focusing on access to the classroom, we need to shift to how we think about access to content and learning process. The most common framework for content access, not just to the classroom itself, is Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

The systemic disadvantages that have hindered students from historically marginalized communities have continued for decades; however, as learning assistance professionals we have the ability and the duty to change this. It is incumbent upon learning assistance professionals to create learning environments in ways that remove these insidious, entrenched barriers to education, and seek to empower students in their own learning. When we think about our institutions and

centers as places to empower students, we must take action against the racist and misogynist structures of hierarchy within education that hold back Black, Latinx, and first-generation students. We must break down barriers to learning and give students the opportunity to focus on course content without being encumbered by the historic systems of injustice that still plague academia. We have the responsibility to examine and reimagine the structures still in place within education that reinforce barriers to learning (Bradshaw, 2018). We must reimagine the structure of the higher education classroom, one which takes into account the historical conditioning all students have experienced and encountered. We must understand the classroom and the teacher-student power dynamics from the student perspective, one that critically and unflinchingly acknowledges how students from underserved populations view faculty, and seek solutions that remove their barriers to asking questions, resolving confusion, and learning.

UDL - an Unfulfilled Promise

A critically reflective underserved student lens recognizes that current classroom practices do not allow all students access to learning assistance and help equally. This leads to unequal and unjust learning environments. In the US, the concept of making learning accessible to all quickly

became codified into public policy (Dalton, 2019). Disability education laws focused on creating access to the learning material itself and received significant federal funding in terms of grants (Tobin & Behling, 2018). However, accessibility to higher education based on issues of race were codified in laws that focused on underserved students gaining access to the educational institutions but not gaining the support systems to ensure they could academically succeed and graduate. The laws ignored how the historic and systemic underserving of Black and Latinx communities may prevent learners from accessing the content present in the classrooms. As with access for differences in learning, physical access to the building is not enough to ensure learning can occur.

This distinction between equal access to a physical classroom as opposed to equal access to the learning experience–and the attached legal and funding attention–dramatically impacts how students experience education. Universal Design is specifically referred to in the Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004, which requires "state educational agencies (or local agencies in the case of district assessments) shall to the extent feasible use universal design principles in developing and administering any statewide assessment." (IDEA, Section 614). Thus, funding is required by law to address intellectual disabilities specifically with UDL, yet there is no comparative law for racial justice within the curriculum. While

the current resource distribution focuses on making content accessible for students with learning disabilities, equal resources have not been made available to assist with issues of content and learning access created by the unjust education system.

The promise of a framework like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is tantalizing – to customize learning environments so that all individuals have the ability to learn (Al-Azawei et al., 2017). UDL is founded upon learning sciences and grounded in the beginning in principles of learning and education (Pisha & Coyne, 2001). In addition, it draws from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology and each guideline or checkpoint is extensively researched and documented (CAST, 2021; Meyer et al., 2014). UDL is widespread and frequently endorsed and recommended as a method to provide access to material and to create a classroom environment accessible to all (Coffman & Draper, 2021; Meyer et al., 2014).

UDL recommends evidence- backed effective pedagogical practice across its three main guidelines - engagement, representation, and action/expression. Engagement with material is intensely personal and involves cognitive processes that are difficult to make overt in large group settings. Motivation is linked to engagement (Caruth, 2018), and UDL recommends pedagogical practices which involve choice, relevance, and reflection to positively influence engagement. UDL's

representation guidelines address individual differences in how learners see, comprehend, and process information. The pedagogical recommendations in this area focus on efforts to customize, clarify, and personalize information. Action and expression guidelines focus on the learner's ability to interact with material through physical, sensory, organizational, and communication means. Recommendations in this area include multiple modes of communication, scaffolding goal setting and planning, and access to varieties of assistive tools and navigation. These three main guidelines form the foundation for pedagogical strategies UDL endorses in the form of over 30 "checkpoints." Examples of these checkpoints include optimizing challenges (from the engagement guidelines), "clarify vocabulary and symbols" (from the representation guidelines), and "guide appropriate goal setting" (from action/expression). These checkpoints are then further broken down into instructional tactics that guide efforts to provide inclusive access to the content. UDL's guidelines and checkpoints rely on learning science, learning theories, and evidence based pedagogical research.

UDL is well grounded in learning science research. Its guidelines and checkpoints are concrete, easy to understand, and describe empirically tested instructional methods. However, like so many other well-meaning structures in education, UDL ignores the impacts of systemic racism, and unintentionally perpetuates the

status quo (Tucker-Smith, 2020). UDL remains politely and quietly "colorblind," failing to acknowledge the needs of students from historically marginalized populations including Black and Latinx students, despite the goal of access and inclusive pedagogy. The historical experience of Black and Latinx students and its impact on accessing and learning content is ignored by UDL. The most egregious and problematic form of this is when educators ignore the inherent student-teacher power dynamic and effects of requiring students to grasp and understand the material on their own or fail to acknowledge the significant impact of stereotype threat and implicit bias on student learning and behavior. The promise of UDL, to make learning accessible to all (CAST, 2021), does not include students impacted by social injustice and an unjust education infrastructure. While UDL's guidelines have admirable goals that seek to promote autonomy and community, they fail to acknowledge the teacher-student power dynamic which disproportionately impacts BIPOC and first-generation students' ability to access the content.

Accessing the curriculum - a broader perspectives

Dismantling the effects of a racist and unjust infrastructure is difficult and requires more than a loose set of recommendations. Effective instructional frameworks can--and should--combat the biases in the educational system. To combat the problematic and

dysfunctional hierarchy of the teacher-student dynamic within traditional learning environments, UDL should broaden its perspective of access to the curriculum and consider the impact of classroom power dynamics, the disproportionate impact on first-generation and BIPOC students, and the pedagogical approaches to remedying this issue as a way of dismantling racist educational structures. Specifically, UDL needs to introduce a third element to the teacher-student power dynamic, thus intentionally disrupting the hierarchy within traditional modes of education and allowing for more empowering learning experiences.

We are not the first to address the potential for UDL as an anti-racist tool. Fritzgerald (2020) addresses harnessing the power of UDL to build a pathway for success for BIPOC students. This text is an important first step in this conversation; however, it focuses mainly on the K-12 ecosystem, whereas our work focuses exclusively on higher education. Tucker-Smith (2020) addresses some of these concerns as issues of cultural dynamics, hidden curriculums, and unexplained expectations.

CAST itself has opened up a process for updating the guidelines. CAST notes that they committed to removing "systemic barriers" as part of this community driven process to assess, augment, and enhance the UDL guidelines. In the spirit of that call, we make the recommendation of adding a classroom power dynamic guideline. This new guideline will address the impact of the inherently

unequal impact of classroom dynamics. Adding this new guideline to the UDL framework will allow UDL to fulfill its promise to all learners.

Embedded tutoring

Embedded tutoring provides this third element, alters the instructional environment, and empowers students to control their own learning. To fulfill the promise to create accessibility for ALL learners, UDL should include embedded tutoring as an effective pedagogical method across multiple guidelines. Embedded tutoring represents the most important and easily accessible practice to address our proposed guideline of classroom power dynamics.

Embedded tutoring is the practice of having a peer tutor who excelled in a particular course assist with the course in a subsequent semester by attending class sessions and offering support when students are working on assignments in the classroom. The tutor "floats" between small groups of students or individual students throughout class time, and most students in the class interact with the tutor at some point during the semester.

Embedded tutoring embodies many metacognitive and academic self-regulatory processes suggested by the UDL framework into one specific vehicle and disrupts the inherent classroom power dynamic. MacDonald's (2000) 12 Step Tutoring

Cycle model is a commonly utilized tutoring framework. Each one of these steps provides a practical method of empowering students as they learn, thus providing an alternative to the hierarchical teacher-student power dynamic that hampers learning in traditional classroom situations.

Table 1
MacDonald's Tutoring Cycle

Step	Task
1	Greeting/Climate Setting
2	Identification of Task
3	Breaking Task into Parts
4	Identification of Thought Processes which underline task
5	Set the agenda for session
6	Addressing the Task
7	Tutee Summary of Content
8	Tutee Summary of Underlying Content
9	Confirmation
10	Next Steps
11	Planning Next Session
12	Goodbye

In Steps 2 and 3, the tutoring process scaffolds the metacognitive skills of planning, self-monitoring, and goal setting. Step 4 focuses on foundational metacognitive and academic self-regulatory strategies. Tutors ask the tutee to verbally walk them through the identified task and point out options or other approaches when the tutee reaches an impasse or makes a bad assumption about how to proceed. Only after these tasks are completed do the tutors move on

to actually assisting with the task at hand; e.g., how to do the derivative in the calculus problem, how to restructure an essay, or what equation to utilize in the physics problem. Covert brain-based processes are made overt during a tutoring session. Tutoring provides a vehicle for the cognitive processes to be developed in an empowering and personalized fashion without the problematic student-teacher power dynamic.

Remedying the unjust classroom through tutoring

Embedded tutoring improves learning for all students, expanding UDL's promise beyond its current narrow implementation, and provides an avenue to help make the education infrastructure more just for BIPOC and first-generation students. Tutoring combats stereotype threat, as students are able to receive assistance without the burden of feeling that their instructors and fellow students are judging their lack of expertise. Tutoring is highly personalized in nature, therefore some UDL recommendations occur in every session as part of the tutoring process. Tutors are trained in a wide variety of techniques, which overlap with UDL recommendations, and tutors apply the techniques as needed. UDL should specifically endorse embedded tutoring as a strategy to remedy classroom power dynamics and create greater access to the content and learning experience for all students.

Learner Choice. Many of the UDL checkpoints and recommendations rely on providing learner choice. For example, UDL recommends allowing students to set their own academic goals and to optimize choice in assignments and tasks. However, for students who experience the classroom as an unequal playing field, who experience micro-aggressions on a daily basis and have been taught that the main path to success in a classroom is to cause the least disruption, experience the classroom itself as a threat, choices may increase confusion and heighten potential misunderstandings. Students dealing with stereotype threat will include how they are perceived based on their selections, potentially negating the benefit of choice (Nicholls, 1984). By adding the third element of peer tutors, it disrupts these dynamics and creates an opportunity for a space that removes these threats. Peer tutors, unlike faculty members, have no grading power over these students.

Customization. Individualization is another theme that underlies many of the UDL strategies across guidelines. This includes recommendations to optimize authenticity, relevance, and salience of the goals, varying challenge and assessments, and providing multiple ways of representing and explaining information. However, in order to customize and individualize to particular students, you must first know where the student is starting from. In a diverse classroom, this becomes challenging for

an instructor. For students who experience stereotype threat, revealing their starting point and where they do not understand can be difficult.

This group of pedagogical strategies recommended by UDL can be difficult to implement in a classroom setting but occur naturally in peer tutoring. Tutoring relationships allow for peers to personalize the content, respond to specific questions, and to adjust explanations to create more relevant examples. A tutoring relationship both allows for the optimal level of challenge and removes the grading-related complications from the instructor-student power dynamic. By focusing on the underlying thought processes guiding the tutee, a tutor can quickly identify and troubleshoot instances of semiotics, vocabulary, or other issues that impede understanding and translation. In addition, tutors also frequently alter displays of information including interpreting visual displays into auditory or vice versa, breaking down difficult concepts into more familiar words, and link information provided in text with figures and pictures. This creates a space for learning that significantly reduces the power dynamics present in the traditional instructional relationship.

Reveals Covert Processes. One of the most important aspects of the UDL pedagogy recommendations focuses on encouraging students to develop metacognitive and academic self-regulatory strategies. Tutors provide models for cognitive processes that are

difficult to address in a traditional classroom setting. In every session, tutors guide goal setting and offer models for goal setting, and they break down large tasks into smaller ones. Students in a tutoring session must also engage in their thought processes aloud and explain their work. Tutors prompt students to see the bigger picture and engage in the chunking of information, and tutors scaffold that process throughout tutoring sessions. Tutors give students immediate, personalized formative feedback in every tutoring session.

Most importantly for developing self-regulated learning skills, tutoring creates space for personal self-assessment and reflection as well as provides a cognitive model for students, both items recommended by UDL. A tutor verbalizing their own coping strategies, their own self-assessment tools, and the importance of reflection, can provide a method for academically underprepared students to learn from a peer without the power dynamic present with instructors. Tutors are trained to engage in this cognitive modeling, eliminating the need for students to ask, reducing the perceived threat of implicit bias, judgements, and microaggressions.

UDL has the opportunity to finally fulfill its goal of making education accessible to all learners by incorporating embedded tutoring as a specific recommendation into its framework--a framework into which tutoring already fits seamlessly. Tutoring is aligned with most of UDL's checkpoints and rests upon similar

learning science research. UDL can succeed in finally disrupting inherent power dynamics and subverting the racialized tone of many classrooms by normalizing access to the tutor through an acknowledgement of the impact of a racialized system, and a strong recommendation for embedded tutoring. CAST should recommend embedded tutoring as an overarching suggestion for UDL writ large.

Conclusion

Systemic racism in education will not be dismantled by chance. No matter how many DEIJ goals schools have, if inherent power dynamics in the classroom continue unchallenged, BIPOC and first-generation students remain at a significant disadvantage. Providing access to the classroom is not enough, we must ensure all can access the content equally and fairly. UDL is an excellent framework, but so far its application has failed to achieve its goal of equality and accessibility for all learners due to a narrow focus on neurological learning differences and a neglect of learning differences due to systemic racial and socioeconomic injustice. By acknowledging the impact of an unjust education system, by expanding the guidelines to include accounting for classroom power dynamics and making a strong recommendation to embed tutoring as a specific strategy to address this concern, UDL can finally be able to achieve the lofty goal it puts forth--equality in education for ALL learners.

Applying tutoring to learning design fulfills the promise of UDL and paves the way for a more equitable and just future in education and beyond.

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Mission and COVID Statements: Writing Centers and Opportunities for Discussing Social Equity

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Abstract

This article examines the results of a study comparing writing centers' mission statements with their statements about changes due to COVID-19. Of the 100 center websites examined, 28 had both mission and COVID statements. Our study unpacks trends found across those 28 websites. Using a content analysis approach, we coded content on these websites for writing pedagogy, political identities, and strategies for addressing COVID. The results suggest that while process pedagogy is the dominant ideology invoked in mission statements, equity in the writing center is a growing concern. The results also suggest that when various centers addressed community safety when discussing COVID, they missed an opportunity to link concerns for community safety with diversity, equity, and access. The results open spaces for discussions about how centers can best convey their ideologies to students via

websites and help students feel seen, heard, and understood.

Keywords: Mission statements, COVID, websites, ideology, pedagogy, diversity, equity

Mission and COVID Statements: Writing Centers and Opportunities for Discussing Social Equity

As writing centers become more aware of possible roles they may play on campus, their sense of mission has evolved far from Steven North's iconic "better writers, not better writing" (1984, p. 438). Writing centers must now account for the positive roles (helping students negotiate rhetorical strategies and situational needs) and negative (contributing to institutionalized, systemic racism) in crafting their missions. The writing center community often professes to help students become "better writers" *and* produce "better" writing, but these notions mean different things to different scholars and centers. Similarly, other tutoring centers struggling to help students succeed in higher education are grappling with issues of equity, access, stigma, and opportunity. Trends in writing center studies, as well as other student resource centers, represent interest in students' academic, social, mental, and emotional needs (Denny, 2005; Denny, Nordlof & Salem, 2018; Kar Tang, 2022; Basta & Smith, 2022; Bunting, 2022; Clements et al., 2021; Johnston, Roush & Mullins, 2023; Connor &

Clinger, 2023). When COVID-19 shifted our educational practices, where attention to educational and academic needs was dominant before, attention to students' physical, social, and emotional needs increased both in universities in general and in writing centers in particular.

The researchers analyzed writing center websites as one example of a peer tutoring center grappling with these issues. Such analysis helps tutoring center administrators better understand both what ideology grounds each center and how writing centers in particular responded to the pandemic. We hope this work helps many tutoring center administrators thoughtfully approach the ways their websites signify ideology to potential student users. The ways writing centers' websites (de)prioritize and represent COVID information, especially as compared to mission statements, shows their ideological approach to tutoring *and* how they enact their stated values in times of fluctuation when students arguably need diverse support. Based on the results of our study, we argue that centers present either *facilitative* or *political identities* via their mission statements. Those who present political identities in their mission statements sometimes miss important opportunities to highlight their student-centered approaches in their COVID statements.

Shifting Disciplinary Identities: From Better Writers to Systemic Oppression

It is no exaggeration to say that the writing center community

has been impacted by—potentially even haunted by—North's (1984) "The Idea of a Writing Center." North outlines what he believes a writing center does and can do: help students learn to be writers by engaging in writerly activity (discussion of writing, the writing process, content, ideas, and attempts) free from grade-related judgment. His article, while revisited and challenged over the decades, is still a gateway article for those entering the profession, and it arguably still situates many writing centers within their institutional contexts by helping administrators explain to outsiders *what they do*.

Since North's article, many other scholars have described the work and purpose of writing centers. Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski's (1999) "Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center" inspired the community to understand that writing centers missions should also include attentiveness to the social realities of students' lived experiences and the role the center plays in everyday racism. They state, "Today, the writing center stands as the most accessible and visible place of remediation within the university" (p. 42) and argue that "the writing center is an ideal place…to begin teaching and practicing a critical and self-reflective form of acculturation" (p. 42). With this understanding that writing centers can be critical sites of discursive awareness, negotiation, and resistance, scholars have pushed to find additional ways centers can support students'

linguistic work and individual students' linguistic expressions.

In the '90s and 2000s, writing center scholarship showed an increasing interest in the center's role in shaping the social identities of the staff, tutors, and writers. Anne DiPardo's (1992) well-known "Whispers of Coming and Going: Lessons from Fannie" opened the eyes of writing center staff and scholars to marginalized students' unmet needs. In the essay, a Navajo student named Fannie tells her tutor, Morgan, that she believes education will help (marginalized) students "'to get around' in the mainstream" American culture (p. 133). DiPardo clarifies that Fannie recognizes English as a gatekeeping language, even reporting Fannie's discussion of other Navajo students who do not speak Navajo in institutional settings because it is "lower class" (p. 128). DiPardo shows that students like Fannie need to do more than talk about their writing to access what they believe they need for success: more specific knowledge of English and the skills needed to use it as a white, native speaker would. Harry Denny (2005) opened a line of inquiry with his "Queering the Writing Center," in which he argues the work of a writing center "involves understanding the manufacture and dynamics of identity, a process that involves discovery and reconciliation with collective identities and discourse communities" (p. 96). Denny focuses "attention to the politics of identity and their material consequences" (p. 97) by extending the conversation beyond composition theory, integrating queer theory as a way to

"inform our critical lens on tutorials and the positioning of writing centers" (p. 97). With articles like Denny's, the field took on critical social issues: How do centers work with bigoted students, protect the rights of tutors and writers with marginalized identities, and tutor for social change and educational equity? The scholarship took up these questions in other ways, too.

Harry Denny, John Nordlof, and Lori Salem (2008) also contribute an understanding of how centers engage marginalized students' needs, studying working-class students. Their study participants, like Fannie, expected something from the center that they did not get. Denny, Nordlof, and Salem (2008) claim:

> Our interviewees helped us see the support they want and need when they come to college. They want writerly support that is direct and authoritative, and they want teachers/tutors who are engaged and willing to go the distance with them. Our students, especially when they are new to the university, want tutors who understand and validate their concerns about grammar and who are willing to help them "sound right." Our interviewees want mentors who can provide generous and proactive support and who don't wait for students to ask for help or expect students to be able to articulate their needs. Along with all this, our interviewees want relief from the stress of feeling like imposters. They want to feel they belong, feel the university welcomes them, and recognize their hard work. (p. 86)

This last sentence is particularly striking: What do centers make of students' desire to fit in and find a place that helps them feel belonging (notably when fitting in means fitting into a different socioeconomic class)? How can writing centers do that more powerfully? Denny, Nordlof, and Salem (2008) present a list of six proposals to meet their interviewees' needs, and some of their proposals describe a return to a previous mentality: one that harnesses expertise, capitalizes on professionalized identities, and uses that experience and professionalization to support students.

The harnessing of expertise that Denny, Nordlof, and Salem articulate might implicate writing centers in another socially fraught area: linguistic prejudice and the writing center's role as gatekeeper within US higher education. Carefully walking the line between supporting students in the ways they want to be supported on the one hand and dismantling systems of oppression, on the other, might make it appear as though writing centers ideologically contradict themselves, especially as writing center scholars have leaned into language and composition scholarship asserting the gatekeeping nature of Edited Academic English (EAE).[1] Vershawn

[1] Scholars and linguists call this American English prestige dialect a variety of things, but in this essay, we refer to it as "Edited Academic English" for simplicity's sake as much as for the need to underscore the racial stigma and systemic oppression associated with this dialect.

Ashanti Young (2010) asserts that students and all writers should be multidialectic and practice their home languages—or at least code-mesh home dialects with the dialects of those around them—to succeed *and* change systemic oppression (p. 114). Laura Greenfield (2011) examines the ways EAE is a gatekeeping dialect and how simply using EAE is not enough to dispel the racism marginalized students experience because racism is at the heart of linguistic prejudice. Racism persists regardless of what language or dialect people of color use (p. 49). As April Baker-Bell (2020) puts it, "Nearly seven decades [after NCTE/CCCC Students' Right to Their Own Language, 1974], we still have English teachers out here perpetuating and advocating for Anti-Black Linguistic Racism" (p. 6). In writing centers, too, may perpetuate this type of linguistic prejudice; writing centers, like other writing programs and tutoring services, are linguistic gatekeepers. However, our ideology is arguably shifting.

In 2016, *Praxis* published a special issue on *Access and Equity in Graduate Writing Support*, followed by another special issue in 2018 on *Race and the Writing Center*. In 2018, the *Conference on College Composition and Communication* themed their gathering on *Languaging, Laboring, Transforming.* In 2022, it was *The Promises and Perils of Higher Education: Our Discipline's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Linguistic Justice.* In 2019, *The Writing Center Journal* published such articles as Kendra Mitchell and Robert

Randolph's "A Page from Our Book: Social Justice Lessons from the HBCU Writing Center" and Grant Eckstein's "Directiveness in the Center: L1, L2, and Generation 1.5 Expectations and Experiences." In 2021, the *Writing Program Journal* published a special issue on *Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Projects in Writing Program Administration*. In 2016, the *National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing* was themed "It's for Everyone: The Inclusive Writing Center." In 2019, it was themed "Migration." These titles, special topics, and themes demonstrate gatekeeping awareness and the role all writing programs play in systemic oppression, and they also demonstrate a willingness to pay attention to and begin the work of anti-oppression and anti-racism. Current writing center theory demonstrates an awareness of how writing centers act as gatekeepers and contribute to systemic oppression: scholars such as Nancy Effinger Wilson (2011) argue that, just as "instructors and [writing center] tutors uphold the standards of the university, including the demand that students use Edited American English," the writing center community–staff and faculty alike–are also living in a moment in which they seek to constantly recognize, name, own, and move beyond our prejudices (p. 189).

Although center staff are increasingly aware of how systemic oppression shapes writing centers, staff are also increasingly aware of ways to combat that systemic oppression. Still, there may be a key component many are overlooking. Centers' websites

supposedly act as gateways for many student writers who find their way to centers. When students seek out landing sites, they may come across mission statements and "about us" blurbs. Such statements typically introduce the students to what they can expect at this particular center. Still, mission statements have a long history of describing the purpose and goals of the organization. As such, mission statements are both explicit and/or implicit assertions of ideology, both anti-oppressive work and work that embraces the status quo. The question centers need to ask themselves is: Do students see our anti-oppression work when they view these websites? Or do they see more of the same remediation and institutionalized hegemonic tendencies toward Edited Academic English?

These questions are particularly important during the era of COVID, especially as, at the height of the pandemic, students found themselves quickly. They brutally pushed to either side of the digital divide. In an age where students became essential workers, watched their families die, or found "relief" in having time to sit around the house and think, the economic and digital divide along races and social classes in the US was made starkly clear. Addressing issues of social equity in writing center scholarship regarding the COVID-era, scholars take on many different perspectives. Megan Kuhfeld et al. (2021) showed how students of color were impacted negatively in the K-12 system,

showing noticeable decreases in math and reading performance from fall 2019 to scores in fall 2020. They additionally showed that though "All BIPOC student groups made learning gains during the pandemic," they were only a percentage of the typical gains their demographic groups made in previous years (Kuhfeld et al., 2021, p. 6). Kuhfeld, et al. argued COVID had a more negative impact on students of color than their white counterparts.

Seeing the learning divide Kuhfeld et al. (2021) described but now at the college level, writing center administrators began trying to assist their own student bodies through action and scholarship. Scholars such as Marilee Brooks-Gillies et al. (2021) pushed center administrators to understand and address key points of need for all centers, and they presented a position statement of how to work through the needs of diverse student bodies and institutional identities. Other scholars, such as Amy Nejezchleb (2020), described more tangible ways to assist students. Nejezchlef (2020) described students' preference for phone-call conferences during COVID-19 because the technology is "simple" and worked for those students "left with poor or nonexistent connectivity or without access altogether" (p. 10). Working to give students access to writing center services via options like phone tutoring during COVID, center administrators had to envision taking care of students, tutors, and support staff. Genie Giaimo (2020) points out the numerous social issues many students faced during the pandemic—from

homelessness and food insecurity to caregiving for family and making ends meet. Understanding these pressures was the first step to providing resources, as she asserted, "This is where issues of wellness and care come in. We have an opportunity to make wellness and care a central part of our training and support for writing center tutors" (Giaimo, 2020, p.6). Throughout the pandemic, centers saw students' needs, access divides, and concerns for students and staff shift and change. A better understanding of shifting social norms and student needs sometimes was made clear to students through texts like mission and COVID statements, through position statements on modality use, and through the various texts campus resources used to connect with students.

Why study center websites, and how?

The researchers explored writing center landing sites and mission statements with two key goals. Their first goal was to understand how the mission statements on centers' websites reflect current theoretical trajectories; in other words, how and to what extent did practice match theory, and if websites represented conflict and/or changing theoretical consensus in the field. The researchers' second goal was to better understand how COVID has affected writing centers: they analyzed changes to centers' landing sites in light of COVID as a way to understand COVID's effects. In particular, the researchers are interested in

(1) how COVID-19 shifted writing centers' practices and (2) if concerns for health and safety had, in some way, aligned with or pointed toward centers' ideologies (as stated or shown in their mission statements).

A center's stated mission/values demonstrate what theories and ideologies ground the center and thus, the center's practices. Mission and values statements should, then, ground the center's approach to pandemic conferencing as a mission statement theoretically grounds all of a center's functions. A mission statement informs how centers run and what goals they uphold. Statements should be the space where centers are grounded, allowing them to know what their "plan" is for times of crisis. In reviewing mission statements, the goal was neither to condemn nor praise centers but rather, to see how shifting priorities illuminated the current state of writing center theory and practice. The researchers sought to understand how centers recognize their students' needs, their ideological identities, and what part COVID has played in their work to meet students' needs (or maintain the institutional system).

The research must be empirically sound because the researchers sought to understand how writing centers epitomize their ideologies rhetorical contexts and moments. To that end, the researchers enact Richard Haswell's (2005) understanding of replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) research to

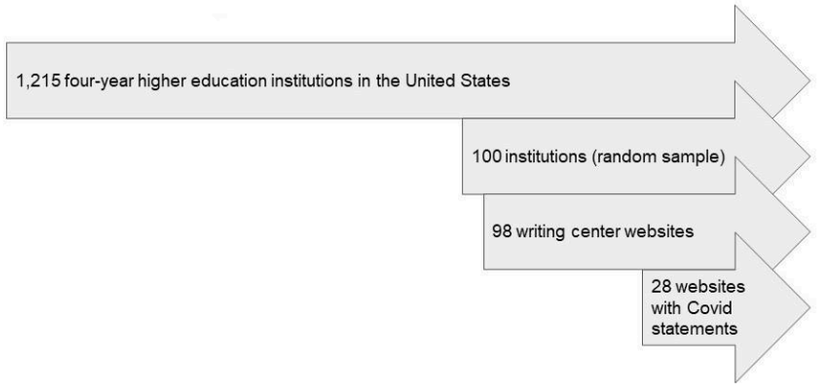
ensure the research can be replicated across various institutions and moments (p. 201). The researchers also leaned into Dana Driscoll and Sherry Wynn Perdue's (2012) call to craft research with a transparent methodological design, from study design, to materials selection (in our case, digital documents), to analysis of those documents within the context of the critical conversation. In this way, the researchers follow in the footsteps of Rebecca Babcock and Terese Thonus (2012) in engaging in evidence-based, empirical research on writing centers. Because the research goals are tied to understanding the alignment of missions/values with practice in 2021-2022, being sure this study can be replicated for individual centers over different time periods allows writing centers the ability to critically assess their own websites and perspectives related to anti-oppression work.

Research Methods

Although writing centers are found in various institutions from elementary schools to all levels of higher education and community centers of every kind, the researchers needed a way to access a manageable amount of data with consistency; therefore, they set their search parameters to writing centers at four-year institutions of higher education. After first collecting a list of all four-year, non-profit institutions in the United States (1,215 at the time of data collection), they used a computer generator to randomize and select 100 institutions from the list

that have writing center websites (some institutions did not have writing centers or publicly-accessible writing center websites). Because this research began as a presentation for the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, 100 sites were a sample the researchers could work deeply with for the presentation and identify salient patterns. The researchers recognize this is a limited case study, and future research may look at larger samples. Of the initial 100, one college was represented twice, and another had permanently closed. Over the course of July and August 2021, screenshots were taken of each of the remaining 98 websites, including screenshots of websites' homepages, any pages containing text explicitly labeled "Mission," "Mission Statement," or "Vision," and writing center-specific only COVID statements (28 of the 98, or 29%) webpages in the sample had such COVID statements (see Figure 1). Because the data was collected during the summer of 2021, these statements may not be applicable for future academic years, but new research might analyze future mission statements or tap into archival material in databases like the internet archive called the Wayback Machine, accessible at archive.org/web/.

Figure 1
Collecting the Data Sample



For each of the 28 center websites with *both* mission statements *and* COVID statements, the researchers first archived the prose of both statements by taking screenshots of the pages where the statements were found and then transcribed the statements' prose as well. Using an inductive, qualitative content analysis (Huckin, 2004; Grant-Davie, 1992), six salient features and themes were identified in centers' mission statements, and six additional salient features and themes were identified in centers' COVID statements. Then, themes were used as categories to code each individual website's paired content. The codes were not mutually exclusive, as one paragraph within a mission or COVID statement could be coded in several ways. The researchers acted as interraters for each other (Grant-Davie, 1992). After drafting definitions for each code, each researcher independently coded the 28-website sample. After rating independently, the researchers compared results and found that

their code definitions were not refined enough. Therefore, the code definitions were revised for easier code identification within the statement transcripts. Researchers used the refined definitions to identify codes throughout the data sets (mission and COVID statements, separately).

First, the researchers analyzed mission statements, defined as (1) any piece of text on the website explicitly labeled "Mission," "Mission Statement," or "Vision" or (2) any piece of primary text on the homepage introducing or summarizing the nature of the writing center. Table 1: Mission Statements shows the six minor codes identified as well as their definitions: process-driven, collaboration-driven, community-driven, assertion-driven, professional-driven, and diversity-driven statements. These six categories index two overarching approaches to a center's articulated ideological standpoint (major codes): The center's mission statements craft *facilitative* and/or *political* ideological identities. The researchers reviewed each website to determine if their mission statements fit into *facilitative* or *political* identity categories.

Table 1
Mission Statements

Major categories (ideology)	Minor codes	Description	Number of sites	Prevalence in data set
Facilitative Identity	Process-Driven	Highlights process as an integral part of writing and/or writing tutoring	28	100%
	Collaboration-Driven	Mentions a collaborative process and/or emphasis on feedback from readers/audiences/peers. Emphasizes social epistemic rhetoric and the notion of collaboration as an integral part of writing.	21	75%
	Community- Driven	Focuses on the center as a community experience, being open to the whole institutional community, and/or the "free" nature of the center.	17	61%
Political Identity	Assertion- Driven	Explicitly discusses what the center does not do, especially but not limited to editing work. Makes an assertion about what the tutors do not provide.	4	14%
	Professional-Driven	Explains the professional quality of tutors either via use of the word professional or by describing particular training tutors receive before beginning working at the center.	11	39%
	Diversity- Driven	Contains some piece of text which explicitly expresses an institutional commitment to diverse groups/voices/writers.	7	25%

A *facilitative identity* most closely aligns with process-driven approaches to tutoring, an attentiveness to the collaborative-driven nature of tutoring, language reflecting a commitment to writing as community-driven, and assertion-driven statements about what tutoring is *not*. *Political identity* has two subcategories, one focusing on constructing the tutors as writing professionals (professional-driven) and another on diversity, equity, and inclusion (diversity-driven).

Next, the researchers analyzed COVID statements, defined as any piece of text on the website that (1) directly referred to coronavirus/COVID/COVID-19 or (2) discussed a shift in the center's operations due to the pandemic, even without directly mentioning COVID. If university websites had banners at the top of the website about COVID, these were not counted as the writing center website having COVID statements. Writing center

websites were only coded as having COVID statements if their website explicitly had text fulfilling either (1) or (2). Table 2: COVID Statements shows centers' six types of COVID statements (minor codes and their definitions). These categories described centers' strategies for providing services throughout an uncertain pandemic semester or academic year. Centers focused on three main strategies: *modal strategy* (attention to virtual-only modalities or increased modality options); *political strategy* (concern for student well-being via safety-driven and equity-driven statements); and *placement strategy* (the COVID statement's placement: top of the webpage or other location). While not a strategy for providing service, *placement strategy* was a strategy center used to gain clients' attention regarding their other service strategies.

Table 2
COVID Statements

Major categories	Minor codes	Description	Number of sites	Prevalence in data set
Modal Strategy	Virtual-only Modalities	Makes a statement that the center has gone wholly online or non-face-to-face.	16	57%
	Increased Modalities	Explicitly explains a shift to some forms of online-only instruction, even if that shift does not directly mention coronavirus. Describes various virtual & face-to-face modalities.	10	36%
Political Strategy	Safety-Driven	Refers to institutional COVID guidelines, makes their own requirements, discussing masking, social distancing, etc.	12	43%
	Equity-Driven	Specifically discusses changes in approach to tutoring in various modalities and/or makes note of equity/access for those with COVID concerns.	6	21%
Placement Strategy	Top of Page	Statement appears at the top of the landing/homepage, before any other information.	16	57%
	Other	Statement appears somewhere other than the top of the landing/homepage or on the subpages.	12	43%

Researchers further subdivided the categories for each strategy. Modal strategies were subdivided according to whether the center

had added additional methods of accessing tutoring (increased modalities) or had shifted to fully online, phone, or email appointments (virtual-only modalities). Political strategies were subdivided into concern for student equity and access to tutoring (equity-driven statements) and student safety and safety protocols, such as masking and social distancing (safety-driven statements). Placement strategies included prioritizing the COVID statement by placing it at the top of the page, before any text about what the writing center is (top of page), or deprioritizing the COVID information by placing it somewhere else on the page (other).

Findings: What do Centers Value?

Mission Statements

Facilitative Identities: Foundational Theories in the Center. Coding revealed salient patterns in writing center mission statements, reflecting larger trends in writing center theory and practice across American higher education. Some ideas—such as those indexing a process-driven, facilitative approach—appeared dominant. These centers' mission statements aligned with North's beliefs that "in a writing center, the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by the instruction" (1984, p. 438). Such statements onunderscored North's comments that centers "are here to talk to writers" (1984, p. 441). Other conceptions of tutoring and the

role of writing centers were also present. Concerns for collaborative learning, linguistic justice, and diversity were less dominant but suggested movement in the field. After all, as North said, most writing centers suggest their "[province] not in terms of some curriculum, but in terms of the writers [they] serve" (1984, p. 438). Today, the students that writing and tutoring centers serve have become more aware of social justice and the nature of writing and communication in gatekeeping American social mobility, just as composition scholars and instructors have become more aware. However, with the COVID-statement placement and content, the findings revealed many centers missed opportunities to connect concerns over community and student safety to larger socially minded visions, values, and theories of writing pedagogy and contemporary writing center theory and ideologies.

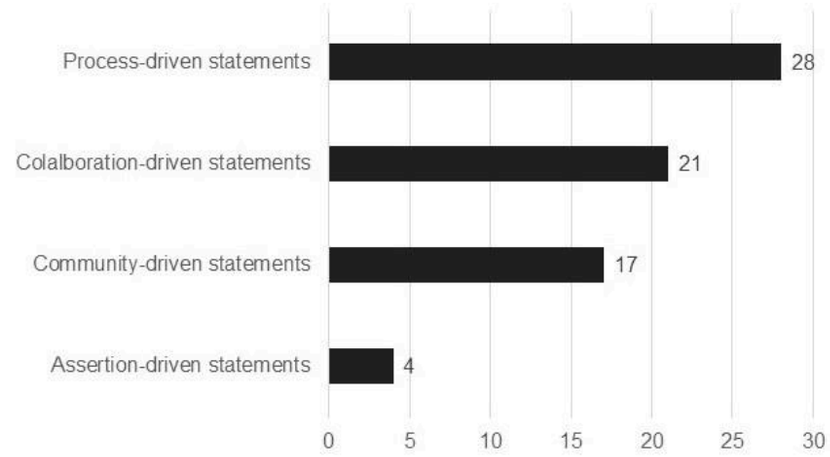
Of the mission statements sampled, 100% (28 websites) displayed a process-driven approach. A representative example stated, "Although tutors are not *editors*, they can help with any stage of the writing process, from initial brainstorming to major structural revisions to putting the finishing touches on a final draft." This two-pronged approach–simultaneously affirming the value of process while emphasizing that tutors will not directly edit papers–shows a commitment to the ideas outlined by North (1984, p. 438) and Brooks (1991, p. 3). Other sites emphasized that "the development of writing abilities is a life-long process," suggesting that students

are not merely improving one paper but rather, improving as writers. Because all centers in the sample made statements about process-driven tutoring, process theory was the core pedagogy for centers in the sample. Even if centers and writers were not engaged in the type of original process-based approaches touted by Donald Murray (1980) and the like, centers still subscribed to the idea that a process-based approach will "help students *engage* in their writing, [and] develop self-efficacy, confidence, and strategies for meeting the challenges of multiple writing situations" (Anson, 2014, p. 228). Such process-driven statements challenged the perspective that centers are sites of remediation and are instead pivotal spaces for developing sound writing techniques. However, these statements did little to combat linguistic prejudice or reduce racist attitudes.

Other tutoring strategies—where writing is seen as a social-epistemic or collaborative event–were also present in the sample. One mission statement said, "Our center is a community of practice, facilitating relationships between students, faculty, and the Writing Center . . . As a community, we learn from each other's experiences and expertise as well as from the experiences and expertise of our clients." By placing the tutor and client as equals in the knowledge-making process, Jamestown establishes a vision of writing and knowledge-making that is community-based and collaborative (Bruffee, 1984a; 1984b). While not as

prevalent as process-driven language, collaboration-driven language was common (75%, 21 websites), and community-driven language (61%, 17 websites). Overall, 28 websites used process-driven language, and 14 used *collaborative* as was community-driven language (see Figure 2). These two categories demonstrated an awareness of social epistemic rhetoric, which conceives knowledge as a social artifact produced by collaboration and discussion. Social-epistemic ideologies presented an important theoretical pillar of writing center pedagogy (Berlin, 2009), one understood through the post-process lens of composition instruction, as Tom Truesdell (2008) pointed out. As language and composition studies made the social turn, critical pedagogies like Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and its legacy scholarship like that of Young (2010) should have made more of an impact on writing center work, especially considering Denny, Nordlof, and Salem's (2018) allusions to the needs of working-class and underrepresented or socially stigmatized students (p. 86). However, as discussed below, the research results showed little attention to socio-ideological identity (centers', tutors', or students') in center mission statements.

Figure 2
Facilitative Mission Statements



Only 14% (4 websites) of the sample exhibited assertion-driven language. One center's mission statement clarified the writing center's role to students: "We do not proofread or edit student work; rather, we help students analyze and strengthen their writing process, so they become more articulate and confident. In keeping with the Honor System, students who use our service must acknowledge Writing Center help on any project they submit for a grade." This assertion-driven statement represented a conscious rejection of current-traditional composition pedagogy, its perceived emphasis on grammatical correctness (parallel with the prescriptive grammar of Edited Academic English) (Connors, 1997), and a desire to reframe the writing center's purpose for students. The statement directed readers to the idea of process. However, the clarification that

students must "acknowledge Writing Center help on any project they submit for a grade" revealed a certain institutional anxiety about the role of writing tutors and the potential to contribute "too much" to a student's paper (showing that the concerns Bruffee 1984a; 1984b addressed decades ago still arise). At the same time, asking for acknowledgment encouraged students to think of the writing center tutors as a *source* in their writing, one which requires proper crediting like any other source. In effect, by asserting what the writing center is *not*, assertion-driven statements made powerful claims about what the center *is*. Still, these assertion-driven statements did not focus on what the writing center is *not* in terms of gatekeeping: Is the writing center a gatekeeper? Will it insist on Edited Academic English? Will students who code-mesh find recognition, support, and encouragement at such a center, or will they instead face consternation and stilted conversations regarding how to code-switch into the so-called rhetorically appropriate Edited Academic English tutors believe (often correctly) faculty want to see in assignments?

Most common in the sample were statements expressing at least one aspect of a facilitative identity (process-driven, collaborating-driven, community-driven, and/or assertion-driven statements), and many statements contained two or more of these aspects (86%, 24 websites), three or more of these aspects (54%, 15 websites), or all four of these aspects (11%, three websites). As noted earlier, the

researchers coded each sentence in a mission statement as a distinct utterance because they indexed such different pedagogical turns. Because these categories often occurred together, these findings suggested that a facilitative identity is integral to current writing center theory and practice.

Although process-, collaboration-, and community-driven language were common, assertion-driven language was relatively rare, used by only three mission statements. The researchers speculate that this rarity of assertion-driven language may be due to the desire of some website writers/designers not to appear standoffish with students. This may be especially true for minority or underrepresented students. According to Denny, Nordlof, and Salem (2018), students may want more precise forms of tutoring and grammatical advice than center tutors are trained to give (or are comfortable giving). At the same time, assertion-driven language that essentially states writing centers are not grammatical helplines may actually deter some underrepresented students from choosing to use center services. Suppose students feel they are not successfully using Edited Academic English but genuinely believe doing so will enable them to pass a class, graduate, and secure professional careers. In that case, they may decide not to use the writing center if they believe the center would refuse to help them. Therefore, centers may not have taken an assertion-driven approach to not alienate

students. Still, mission statements can be used to educate students about rhetorical choices, their decisions to use or embrace certain varieties of English, and how those decisions affect identity.

Political Identities: Contemporary Theories in the Center.

While the researchers found evidence of a facilitative, process-driven pedagogy in the data sample, they found less evidence of attention to the political identities of either tutors or students on writing center websites. That is, fewer mission statements adhered to newer theories in the field regarding the politicization of the writing center. Thirty-nine percent (11 websites) of the data set emphasized the professional nature of tutors, drawing attention to how tutors are trained "experts" in writing (Bright, 2017, p. 12; Jefferson et al., 2007, p. 4). One writing center mission read, "The [writing center] is staffed by trained, experienced peer writing partners available to support clients of all abilities from any course at any stage in the process . . .." It is likely similar centers emphasized the professional nature of tutors to help "sell" the center. This center's rebranding of students as "clients" calls to mind other moves in writing center theory (where tutors are consultants and student writers are clients). The word "client" is a form of market language professionalizing centers; "students" do not visit "tutors," but rather, "partners" support "clients." This emphasis also doubled to acclimate peer tutors as skilled laborers to a professional identity, one that writing center theory has

strategically cultivated (Bright, 2017, p. 4). Beyond this rebranding of roles, tutors and students were not indexed with political identities (party affiliation, gender, sexuality, etc.) in mission or COVID statements.

Political identities can be professional identities, even if writing centers are reticent to broach the topics that truly politicize a center. Within the mission statements, only seven (25%) are diversity-driven, even though diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a growing topic in writing center studies (as discussed above). The seven statements coded as diversity-driven emphasized the importance of writing in the context of marginalization and political identity. One statement stands out as a lengthy and detailed example of one such statement:

> In these times, and in this place, we are called to reflect on what we in the Writing Center have done and still can do to act against anti-Black racism and reflect our firm commitments to social justice. Caring for all students is our personal and professional priority, and as such, we remain dedicated to supporting Black lives. We unequivocally stand against police brutality in our communities and against the systemic violence that Black students have endured on campus, in classrooms, and in the Writing Center.
>
> The Writing Center seeks to foster educational equity and is committed to social justice and inclusivity; however, we are

> coming to terms with the reality that these efforts are not enough. As part of an academic institution, we have been complicit in harm against students of color and have perpetuated anti-Black racism in our role as a gatekeeper of academic writing, which oftentimes perpetuates linguistic injustice. In response to calls to action from students within our department and across campus, we are rethinking our core practices and building on our recent inclusivity initiatives in order to decenter whiteness and center Black epistemological knowledge and practices. We will work to promote educational equity, foster social justice, and undo systems of oppression throughout the work that we do. We look forward to communicating more about these initiatives and practices as they progress.

This center acknowledged that tutors' roles in encouraging student voices is not simple or linear. Instead, this statement came to terms with the fact that tutors, by inculcating a kind of academic voice and style in students, participate in erasing students' unique voices and identities. The radical suggestion in this statement of flipping the epistemological bases of writing—both centering "black epistemological knowledge and practices" while "decentering whiteness"—demonstrated how writing centers could begin to address such concerns. Other centers dedicated less language to these ideas while still emphasizing the importance of acknowledging diversity in the writing center. For example, one

writing center acknowledges, "Because [the university] is one of the most multicultural and linguistically diverse universities in the country, our tutoring practices reflect this rich diversity." While some centers integrate these ideas into their mission statements, the data set suggests most center websites do not yet address these concerns.

Whether centers emphasized a professional identity, a diversity-driven identity, or both matters a good deal, as issues of identity are inseparable from rhetoric, and by extension, composition. Fifty-seven percent (16 websites) of the sample was coded for at least one kind of political identity and 11% (3 websites) was coded for both. However, 43% (12 websites) were not coded for any language reflective of political identity, suggesting that attention to the political identities of students and tutors is not a universal priority. An indexing of political identity may be beneficial to centers, though, if they want to cultivate a social justice positionality on campus. Including a statement about openness or types of tutors ("partners") employed, even something about the center's worldview, may set the tone for some students to consider the center as someplace they can actually go to receive the support they need in the manner they need it. On the other hand, heavy-handedness in the mission statement might cause potential clients to be disinterested in using the center because of

perceived political alignments. This is a difficult position for a center to be in. The center may often have to decide how to cultivate the mission statement with integrity while walking the narrow line needed to maintain the center's autonomy and funding, all while catering to various student bodies and, ultimately, getting students in the door to (primarily) strengthen writing instruction on campus and (secondarily) demonstrate usage to budget and resource allocators. Taken together, our sample indicates varied approaches to explaining and defining the role of a writing center: the student body demographics and institution type may have some bearing on which centers rely more heavily on facilitative identities than political identities. However, that information was outside the purview of this study.

COVID Statements

How did the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic change the approaches reflected in centers' mission statements? While the researchers did not analyze websites before *and* during COVID, paying attention to how writing center websites addressed the ongoing challenges presented by COVID provides one lens into potential changes. Centers' priorities were analyzed via their modal, political, and COVID statement placement strategies.

Centers often used their COVID statements to describe a *modal strategy*. Over half the sample (57%, 16 websites) were virtual-only modalities: their COVID statements explained that the center had

gone wholly online or wholly not in-person. Many centers' websites stated that all services were now online: e.g., "In light of the impact of COVID-19, the Writing Center will not hold face-to-face consultations in Buswell library during the 2020-2021 school year. Instead, we have moved our services online." A smaller but significant number of sites adopted a mixed strategy, employing online synchronous, online asynchronous, email, phone call, and face-to-face formats. These center sites offer mixed modalities (36%, ten websites). The diverse difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic—disease, lockdowns, virtual instruction, etc.—prompted diverse responses from writing centers. One center offered three distinct options: "Online Consultation by Appointments," "Drop-In Online Consultations," and "Written Feedback Appointments." These different digital modalities suggested attention to differences in assignments and student needs. Scheduled appointments were 50 minutes, reflecting the need for detailed discussions of a (potentially longer than average) paper. Drop-in appointments were shorter, reflecting both the availability of tutors but also the need for quicker, time-flexible writing help. The asynchronous feedback option enabled students with poor/limited internet connectivity to still receive feedback. This statement exemplified how expanded modalities allowed centers to address unique COVID-related challenges.

The researchers also considered the political strategies on display in centers' COVID statements, with 43% (12 websites) using safety-driven language and 21% (6 websites) using equity-driven language. One writing center had a safety-driven COVID statement emphasizing procedure: "The Reading Writing Lab will be offering both in-person and online tutoring for spring 2021. Masks and social distancing (three feet or more) will be enforced" (par.). Others emphasized safety specifically as an issue of access and equity: "The WRC is committed to offering continued writing support and will continue to adjust policies in response to COVID-19 . . . You may be off campus, but you are not alone." Language like this showed students that safety precautions were a piece of a larger mission concerned with their physical, social, and mental/emotional well-being.

The political strategies in COVID statements, in contrast with the mission statements coded for diversity-driven statements, showed a gap in current thinking. Of the seven schools whose mission statements were coded as diversity-driven, none discussed equity issues in their COVID statements. Yet, five had moved wholly to virtual instruction, while the remaining two offered flexible modalities. Equity and safety driven COVID statements presented an opportunity for center websites to connect safety issues and access to larger diversity goals in the writing center. One center's equity-driven mission statement said, "In order to prioritize the

health and safety of our student visitors, staff, faculty, and everyone's 'ohana, we have kept our tutoring services online for the Fall 2021 semester." This statement was both safety-driven *and* equity-driven because it directly addresses the *communal* aspect of the pandemic in protecting everyone's "'ohana." Access to safe tutoring and education is not only a matter of the individual, but also a matter of the family, broadly defined, and this statement emphasizes how individual safety cannot be divorced from the context of community safety and access. However, this same writing center's mission had a professional political identity (not equity-driven), showing a disconnect between these two concerns. Those centers with diversity-driven mission statements did not make equity-driven COVID statements in the same way as the center quoted above. Such writing centers missed a crucial opportunity in their COVID statements to connect their response to COVID to questions of access, power, and equity in the same manner as those COVID statements coded as equity driven. It is possible, of course, that this missed opportunity is because the COVID statements were authored by others in the institution—a marketing team, crisis management professionals, etc.—and that the writing center administrators themselves had little say in the language of these statements. Follow-up interviews with center administrators

would have to be conducted to ascertain who wrote these statements, but such work was not the purview of this study.

Another important trend was in the placement of COVID statements. Over half of the sample (57%, 16 websites) placed COVID information at the top of their webpages, prioritizing it over general information about the writing center and its goals. While this may have been done for convenience and visibility concerns, the placement strategy nonetheless revealed an institutional priority for discussing COVID. Although over half of these sites (9 out of 16) moved to online-only instruction, only five built statements about safety into their COVID information. One site containing both safety- and diversity-driven statements said, "To protect the health and safety of our students, consultants, and community, all Writers Workshop services are being offered online." This connection between diversity and safety was subtle. However, it reflected an understanding that diversity and safety are integrally connected. Both deserved "top billing" on the writing center website by being placed as the first major text on the page.

Less than half (43%, 12 websites) placed the information further down on the page, prioritizing general writing center information over the immediate threat of COVID. This placement strategy implicitly argued that COVID information, while important, did not supersede the importance of the writing center's overall mission, values, and goals. One center placed its COVID statement with the

heading "Excellent Writing Survives the Pandemic!" below the general writing center information. This heading emphasized that COVID information was secondary to the primary goal—"Excellent Writing"—and contextualized the pandemic as a threat to the Writing Center that it nonetheless "survives." This visual hierarchy indicated to students that COVID was one consideration but not *the* consideration.

To be clear, the researchers do not argue any placement strategy (top, bottom, side) is superior to another, especially as placement may have been a top-down decision from other administrators across the university. Emphasizing writing skills over COVID-related threats—threats to one's health and life—was a choice that came with some pedagogical upsides but was not without downsides. In analyzing these placement strategies, we are more interested in what any rhetorical choice reveals about a center's commitment to ideology. The findings suggest that institutions were concerned with safety or equity but did not consistently connect those practices to community safety, access, and diversity.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that American writing centers' identities tend to be facilitative or *political identities*. The COVID pandemic allowed writing centers to showcase those identities through the choices the center made while navigating the

pandemic. Those choices were conveyed through COVID statements that sometimes aligned or deviated from identities presented in centers' mission statements. Linguistic justice, diversity, access, and inclusion are of growing importance to all tutoring centers, especially writing centers, where language and identity are central. While most of the writing center mission statements studied expressed a facilitative identity and a process-based pedagogy, a few represented the contemporary discussion about inequity and the gatekeeping role centers often play. The center websites studied revealed in both their mission statements and COVID statements worry about the safety and health of students that were physical, academic, social, and emotional.

The center websites studied indicate adherence to foundational identities in the field. Writing centers are still committed to descriptions of centers as spaces where writers learn to be better writers, where the process is emphasized, where tutors engage in Socratic conversation, and where writers hold the pen (or keyboard). It is hard to let go of facilitative identities, but they do not have to be hard to build upon. Being open about political ideologies does not have to come at the expense of best practices of writing instruction. Instead, center administrators might use mission statements to talk with and support students marginalized in their writing because of their socioeconomic and sociopolitical identities rather than their skills. Not all students think they cannot

write because they earn low grades—some think they can't write because their very identities have been questioned and emphasized as less than (Greenfield, 2011). A writing center mission statement can combat this mentality and invite underrepresented students to feel seen.

The findings in this study suggest there is a certain messiness of pedagogy-in-practice present in writing centers. That messiness came across in both mission statements and COVID statements. While a facilitative identity (conveyed by a center's mission statement) made room to meet students where they are and to allow room to serve students in broad ways, the data examined adhered to oft-repeated normative discourse about writing centers and their work. These statements did not challenge the idea of Edited American English as the standard of classroom-related written English or demonstrate to students that the center might help them find their footing in an institution that might otherwise not feel as comfortable. For minority students, a facilitative identity did not immediately translate into one that facilitates negotiating the complex landscape that is *belonging* or *fitting in* or even *succeeding* on campus. Students of color, ESL students, LGBTQA+ students may not see themselves reflected in writing center mission statements, may not see a space where they can grow and learn without giving up elements of their identities. COVID statements

in the data set further demonstrated that writing centers are not always aware of the unique circumstances affecting these often-ostracized student groups, either.

As noted in the literature, throughout the COVID pandemic, BIPOC communities have suffered more than white communities, especially early in the pandemic (Zita Nunes, 2020; Ford, Reber, & Reeves, 2020). In addition, BIPOC students and students from low-income backgrounds tended to have less access to technology and often worked more hours and in more service-related industries than wealthier, often-white counterparts (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). For those centers whose mission statements reflected the growing awareness that inequity and racial prejudice play across our institutions of higher education, viewers might have expected to see COVID statements that specifically addressed that inequity and prejudice, but the data set did not show this. There were no statements claiming, "To make sure you get the writing help you need while you take on more hours at your front-lines work, our writing center now offers online, asynchronous appointments!" No statements in the data took on the heavy work of acknowledging students' difficult lives throughout the pandemic regarding the workloads often seen with underrepresented students (workloads that included caregiving for family members, contributing to family finances, supporting family members, and unequal access to technology and institutional resources, especially internet-based

resources). While institutions frequently spoke about the need to support students—and made every effort to do so—throughout the early stages of the pandemic, in this sample, centers' COVID statements did not describe the ideological, political implications of their choices about how to maintain the center's mission throughout the COVID pandemic or its endemic stages.

The findings suggest preliminary ways of understanding the data. The researchers look forward to expanding this research to consider larger samples of center mission statements or the ongoing response to COVID. The researchers further anticipate future studies that demonstrate connections between institutions' mission/COVID statements and their student body demographics, Carnegie Classification, size, and program diversity. Reading and analyzing the content of writing center websites is also only a beginning, as studying closely the hierarchies, hiring practices, appointment structure, center design, and lived processes of any writing center will provide a richer, more detailed picture. Regardless, identifying how centers integrate concerns about pedagogical and ideological structures (tutoring system, style, approach) via their mission statements and websites opens conversations for developing diverse communities of writers across institutions.

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Basic Writers and Graduation Rates: More Respectful Alignment

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Abstract

This study is a follow-up to one on the pass rates of basic writers in a large, urban Midwestern university. Students who came for eight or more mandatory writing center tutorials for their basic writing course passed at a rate of 90% or higher each semester from 2013-2016. The current study examined their graduation rates. These students graduated in 4-6 years at an average of 64.86%, whereas their cohort of basic writers who attended fewer or no tutorials graduated at a rate of 35.38%. The respectful alignment of programs may be a factor in these figures. Neither study can claim any causation.

Keywords: graduation rates, basic writers, writing centers, course-based learning

Basic Writers and Graduation Rates: More Respectful Alignment

No single figure can be given as a national graduation rate for basic writers because it is hard to study—bundled in with "remedial" students—and institutions do not always provide such

information (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2018; Jimenez et al., 2016). Even the graduation rate figure itself can be complex: sometimes institutions give a 6-year graduation rate figure that hides low graduation rates at four years (Marcus, 2021). If we stay with this category of students who take a set of remedial courses (like mathematics, reading, and writing), we can compare graduation rates three ways. For students who complete their remedial courses, their graduation rate is 55%; for students who never had to take remedial classes, their graduation rate is 67%; and for students who did not complete their remedial classes, their graduation rate hovers between 30-33% (Chen, 2016, pp.34-5). Everyone (from researchers, economists, administrators, parents, students, instructors to tutors, etc.) wants to know whether remedial education is worth it. These remedial courses can set students back regarding credit hours, general education requirements, and confidence. The level of preparation matters: the more underprepared, the more the remedial coursework fostered graduation (Chen, 2016, p. viii). However, for adequately prepared first-year students at 4-year institutions, no difference in graduation rates appeared for those who took remedial courses versus those who did not (Chen, 2016, p. viii).

Increasingly, first-year students nationally test into basic writing at a rate of 60% (Jimenez et al., 2016). The number of required writing courses varies by school—some one, some two.

Given the confusion that exists around whether such courses promote the goal of graduation, studying the graduation rates of basic writing students has been an important issue. We need to know the factors that promote learning and graduation for our basic writers. Teaching and tutoring basic writers pose so many extra challenges, especially now: low enrollment looms causing institutional instability; the lag in students' attention persists; and in some institutions, more students from other countries come to our doors with English not as their first language.

In a previous article, this author discovered that pass rates of basic writers who attended eight or more mandatory writing center tutorials over four years from 2013-2016 were clearly and consistently above those students who chose never to attend (Table 1) (McDonald, 2017). The course design mandates these tutorials; however, teachers vary widely in enforcing or counting attendance. Therefore, these numbers most likely show a mix of students urged to attend them, and those told tutorials were optional. Enough time has passed that we can study their 4-6-year graduation rates (Table A2) compared to their entire English 100 cohort (Table A1) thanks to the scheduling software used by this large, urban Midwestern university (Starfish, 2023).

Table 1
Pass Rates for English 100 Students without Withdrawals or Never Attended

PASS RATES	8+ tutorials	7-1 tutorials	0 tutorials	N=students
Spr 2013	100%	78%	34%	205
Fall 2013	95%	76%	47%	480
Spr 2014	90%	60%	32%	207
Fall 2014	100%	83%	57%	441
Spr 2015	95%	73.9%	34.1%	196
Fall 2015	95.5%	84.4%	42.9%	452
Spr 2016	94%	67%	29%	209
Fall 2016	100%	87%	62%	448

Table A1
Graduation Rates for English 100 Student Cohorts Fall 2013-Fall 2016

	Total ENG 100 Students	Graduation Rate after 4 years	Graduation Rate after 5 years	Graduation Rate after 6 years	4-6 Year Graduation Rate
Fall 2013	480	15.28%	30.00%	35.09%	26.79%
Fall 2014	441	20.59%	37.33%	41.18%	33.03%
Fall 2015	452	26.68%	46.20%	52.06%	41.65%
Fall 2016	448	28.79%	41.32%	50.11%	40.07%

Table A2
Graduation Rates for English 100 Students Who Completed 8 or More Writing Center Tutorials Fall 2013-Fall 2016

	ENG 100 Students with 8+ Tutorials	Graduation Rate after 3-4 years	Graduation Rate after 5 years	Graduation Rate after 6 years	4-6 Year Graduation Rate
Fall 2013	95	65%	30%	5%	63.16%
Fall 2014	79	64.70%	29.41%	5.88%	64.56%
Fall 2015	60	63.41%	36.58%	2.44%	68.33%
Fall 2016	71	13.3%	71.11%	15.55%	63.38%

Neither of these studies could claim any causation. While important calls to randomized, aggregable, data-supported (RAD) research remain the top goal of writing center research (Bouquet, 1999; Driscoll & Perdue, 2012; Lerner, 2001; Schendel & Macauley, 2012), this study took as its guide the medical world where studies of correlations still bring important information without knowing why the link occurs. For instance, medical researchers know that if individuals own a dog, they get more exercise (Westgarth et al., 2019); they are swift to step up and say they have no idea whether the dog gets individuals off their couches or whether the individuals are already making smart choices by having the dog. They do not know, and they admit it. We do not know whether tutoring directly fosters graduation for basic writers, but we need to study it. Many writing centers, as veteran director Jeanne Smith of Kent State University said at the 2019 Eastern Central Writing Centers Association meeting, have data similar to the data here. Maybe it is time that we collect this data and share it. Further, the consistency in graduation rates points to the necessity of aligning programs for basic writers.

Program Alignment

The previous article outlined the alignment among programs at this large, urban Midwestern university, and a summary is provided here. The remedial writing program follows the Stretch Program from Arizona State University (Glau, 1996; 2007) where

students receive attention to skill development in mandatory tutorials; and if they pass English 100, they go on to take the regular English 102 course. Students pay a $50 fee for tutoring that yields eight tutorials of half-an-hour each at $13/hour for the tutor. The English 100 course has a set curriculum modeled on the regular English 101 course that has four assignments (summary, rhetorical analysis, argument, reflection portfolio); the classes are identical except for tutoring. The set curriculum aids in the training of writing center tutors. A chart of the mandatory tutorials (Appendix) helps students keep track of their tutorials and offers a visual display of writing center services (Beech, 2007). Students receive support from advisors in the First-Year Advising Office that includes Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Service (called TRIO). Librarians aid students in their search for sources in their argument paper. Without meeting together, these groups work quietly to foster the advancement of our basic writers. Consultations among various units suffice (e.g., writing center tutors' consulting advisors to request support for students from success coaches or instructors' sharing assignments with librarians).

Mandatory Tutorials as Interactive, Meaning-Making, and Offering Clear Expectations

In a long-awaited meta-analysis on studies of the benefits of tutorials, Salazar (2021) demonstrated that tutoring holds great benefits especially for struggling students. In the richly synthesized review of mandatory tutorials, Rendelman (2013) found that the resistance students display is counterpoised with the benefits they reap. Holding a mirror to learning center professionals, Wells (2016) suggested we can hold resistance to them too: we can be focused on valuing students' freedom of choice or their intrinsic motivation to learn instead of the clearly demonstrated value of these tutorials. Institutions and departments can support but never really see their long-term benefit except for studies like these.

Without much research on the graduation rates of basic writers, we can turn to the successes that several scholars have reported. The success of tutorials (alongside advising, curricular, and financial support) has been highlighted in the CUNY Accelerated Study of Associate Programs and its replications in Ohio that doubled graduation rates (Scrivener et al., 2015). These scholars highlighted the interactivity necessary for remedial students. Qualities of mandatory tutorials also echo the specific ways writing facilitates learning according to a large-scale study (Anderson et al., 2015). These qualities are interactivity, meaning-making, and clear writing expectations. Interactivity is an essential component of tutoring

where students discuss their writing with a tutor; meaning making takes place when tutors secure writers' agreement about the value of a task and engage in "integrative, critical, or original thinking" (p. 207); and clear writing expectations are frequently the heart of most tutorials as most tutors turn to the written assignment to discuss the student's attempt. Taken together, these studies show the value of mandatory tutorials for enhancing learning and graduation rates.

Conclusion

Learning center professionals may want to collect and share data regarding pass rates and graduation rates in order to bolster future studies with RAD research. Interviewing students to discern their motivation for attendance would be a great direction. Interviewing tutors about these students' motivation would also be great. This initial study of graduation rates could not claim any causation; future scholars can imagine more ways to target factors that enhance the learning of writing and graduation.

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Appendix

English 100 Assignment-Linked Tutorials and Workshops

Workshop Number	Date	Topic	Comments	Tutor Initials
1		**MBTI**		
2		**Reading/Plagiarism**		
3		**Grammar Highlights**		

Tutorial Number	Date	Topic (Ideal—planning welcome too)	Comments	Tutor Initials
1		**1st version Summary**		
2		**2nd version Summary**		
3		**1st version Rhetorical Analysis**		
4		**2nd version Rhetorical Analysis**		
5		**1st version Argument**		
6		**2nd version Argument**		
7		**1st version Reflection**		
8		**2nd version Reflection**		

Case Study: Using Direct Assessment to Measure Learning in Supplemental Instruction

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Abstract

Indirect and direct assessment methods have a long-standing history in college learning centers. Being more resource-intensive and time-consuming, direct assessment methods are often underrepresented in the literature and in practice. This paper presents a case study of how a pretest-posttest assessment initiative was designed to measure student learning during supplemental instruction (SI) sessions. Significantly higher post-test scores illustrate that similar direct assessment methods can be used effectively by learning center administrators to document student learning, improve training programs, and improve the value offerings of their centers.

Keywords: learning center, direct assessment, supplemental instruction

Case Study: Using Direct Assessment to Measure Learning in Supplemental Instruction Sessions

Although the specific services of college learning centers across the United States are highly contextual and varied, it can be argued that in general, learning centers distinguish themselves from other forms of student support by enjoying unique proximity to the curriculum, embracing the inclusive paradigm that services are for all student learners regardless of academic performance, and infusing some flavor of peer tutoring (Sanford & Steiner, 2021). All these characteristics and their associated benefits to students are obvious to the seasoned practitioner but may be overlooked by upper-level administrators and other external stakeholders, especially in contexts where financial austerity and performance metrics are guiding an increasing number of programmatic decisions. Despite over five decades of evidence that college learning centers benefit institutions and the students they serve, it continues to be imperative for learning center administrators to continually refine and articulate their center's value proposition (Sanford & Steiner, 2021). This paper provides a case study of how the Center for Learning and Student Success at Florida

Atlantic University uses direct assessment methods to enhance articulating its value proposition to faculty, administrators, and students.

Before proceeding with the case study, this section will attempt a general overview of assessment, define key assessment classification terms, and provide additional resources for in-depth study. We encourage emerging and established learning center professionals to spend time with the additional resources discussed in this paper, exposing them to the rich history of assessment in learning centers and preparing them for engaging in assessment conversations across their campuses. As you will see, learning assistance centers have been engaged in assessment since their inception. It should be noted that this overview is intended only to set the framework for our case study and serve as a general reference point for the reader, not an authoritative or comprehensive assessment resource.

Developmental education programs, learning assistance centers, and assessment are all intimately intertwined throughout the history of American higher education (Arendale, 2004; Wyatt, 1992). A fully comprehensive discussion of learning center assessment is beyond the scope of this paper; for those interested in an in-depth overview of assessment in college learning centers, Sanford and Steiner (2021) and Toms and Moschella (2018) provided comprehensive guides digestible for new professionals and equally as informative for experienced professionals. Both resources clearly

articulate the benefits and limitations of frameworks and methodologies that can be used to create something as large in scale as an annual center assessment plan to something much smaller in scale as an assessment of an individual tutoring session. When considering engaging in assessment redesign, we strongly encourage the reader to research and pursue certifications offered by professional organizations that allow for criterion-referenced assessment and peer review, such as the Learning Center Leadership Certification offered by the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA) and the International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC) offered by the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA).

Learning center administrators must understand the major assessment types and their associated implications. Assessment initiatives can be classified as either *formative* or *summative* and *direct* or *indirect*. Elbeck and Bacon (2015) provided a nice synthesis of the various definitions of these terms. While *formative* assessment usually occurs during the program or process being assessed and often focuses on identifying areas for immediate improvement, *summative* assessment usually occurs after the program or process has been completed and often focuses on the final product or learning gains. Whereas *indirect* assessment often uses proxies that covary with what is being

measured (e.g., student learning), *direct* assessment often uses tangible demonstration where task performance is rated (Elbeck & Bacon, 2015). Toms and Moschella (2018) provided a variety of examples of each of these assessment types that are valuable for learning centers, including indirect measures such as self-reported learning gains, course grade comparison studies, and satisfaction surveys as well as direct measures such as essays, exams, portfolios, and observations. Comprehensive assessment plans in learning centers should include assessment initiatives that vary between these categories (i.e., a mix of initiatives that are *formative-direct*, *formative-indirect*, *summative-direct*, and *summative-indirect*). Both Sanford and Steiner (2021) and Toms and Moschella (2018) provided examples of how different assessment methods can be implemented to better articulate the value college learning centers provide to their students, colleges, and campuses.

A Brief Overview of Assessment in the Center for Learning and Student Success

Florida Atlantic University (FAU) is a public research university in Boca Raton, Florida with an approximate enrollment of 30,000 students. FAU is the most diverse public institution in Florida, with over 50% of the student population identifying as minority students. Located within the larger university learning center, the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) offers academic support services for students enrolled in science, business,

engineering, and languages courses. Services include a large SI and peer-tutoring program, as well as a portfolio of services designed specifically for online learners. In our SI program, SI leaders attend course lectures, meet weekly with faculty, develop course-paced lesson plans and handouts, and hold two to six fifty-minute study sessions that typically bookend the course lecture. Our CRLA-certified peer tutoring programs typically involve less structured small group tutoring sessions, serving as opportunities for students to ask specific questions related to course content or successful study skills. During 2022, the academic support programs in the CLASS office saw over 29,000 student visits by approximately 4,500 unique students. Support services are provided by fellow undergraduates and sometimes by graduate students. With three full-time learning center staff and two graduate assistants employed continuously during the 2022 academic year, it was challenging to find extensive time for data analysis and assessment.

Before describing our center's assessment activities, it is important to discuss our alignment between the university's strategic plan, our center's mission statement, and specific center goals. Indeed, it is well documented that all center-level assessment efforts should align with strategic priorities through the organizational structure to the university's (or university system's) strategic plan (Mageehon & Bradford, 2018). In Florida,

our Board of Governors has a continued focus on ten performance metrics that include four-year graduation rate and academic progress rate (State University System of Florida Board of Governors, 2023). Florida Atlantic's strategic plan is largely crafted around achieving success in these metrics, designed to propel the institution to be the fastest-improving research university in the country. The strategic plan specifically emphasizes developing an academic support structure that fosters student success, especially through student retention initiatives and leadership development opportunities (Florida Atlantic University, 2018).

Fortunately for our center, aligning with our university's strategic plan is quite straightforward. Through a collaborative process with center staff, our center adopted the following mission statement:

Student success is our purpose. We empower individual students to reach their full potential inside and outside the classroom. The Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) cultivates student success and academic excellence by developing academic support and engagement programs that guide students to a future of lifelong learning. (Center for Learning and Student Success, 2016)

This mission statement has guided the planning, implementation, and assessment of our academic support programs for the past seven years.

Despite limited resources, assessment has been ongoing in the Center for Learning and Student Success since its opening in 2011. Historically, semesterly assessment initiatives have included: surveys distributed to visiting students that cover their experience and how their visit impacted their motivation and perceived comfortability with the course content; grade comparison studies looking at differences in outcomes between those who attended tutoring and those who did not, often sortable by student demographics or other attributes (e.g., student athlete status; ongoing tutor evaluations such as those required by the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA); and faculty surveys to gauge faculty perception of tutoring services and their perceived impact on the students in their courses. Specifically, for SI, semesterly assessments include continual observations by center staff, grade analysis, and an end-of-term student experience survey for attending students and participating faculty. The data from all these assessments were compiled semesterly and annually for a variety of external and internal stakeholders (e.g., learning center leadership, the institutional research office, the dean's office, the learning center advisory board, affiliated faculty, academic advising units, etc.) across campus. To strengthen and reinforce these consistent and favorable results, new leadership in the dean's office recently

asked the center to implement assessment methodologies that showed direct measures of student learning.

According to the classification schema previously discussed, most, if not all, the assessment initiatives listed above are considered indirect assessment methods. In essence, the existing assessment initiatives were not asking students to demonstrate their understanding but instead were asking them to self-assess or were relying on downstream measures such as final course grades. Furthermore, even the more rigorous comparison methodologies we considered adding (e.g., propensity score matching) were limited in identifying causal inference (Fan & Nowell, 2011). Learning center administrators should be aware of these limitations and the common rebuttal that often results from presenting favorable grade comparison data: that there may be some outside variable or a self-selection bias that drives grade differences attributed to academic support. Even after meticulous data gathering and compiling a lengthy annual report, this common assessment mix leaves the door open for administrators to question what students are truly learning while in the learning center and thus weakens the overall articulation of the center's value proposition.

During the last assessment planning process, it became evident that the center needed an additional assessment initiative to measure student learning during academic support sessions. After dusting off our educational research textbooks from graduate school

and getting feedback from a pre-conference session that one of our colleagues hosted at the NCLCA conference in 2022, center leadership decided to pilot a direct assessment of learning initiative to better articulate the value-add of our learning center services to university stakeholders. Nearly a decade ago, Norton and Agee (2014) stipulated that learning centers need to move toward these types of outcome assessments. Despite the discussion in the literature, this was our center's first exploration of this type of assessment.

For the first iteration outlined in this paper, the center's leadership team used a quasi-experimental pretest and posttest to measure student learning during SI sessions. These and even more rigorous designs are nothing new and are well represented through scholarship. Classified as direct measures, pretest-posttest designs have been successfully used in courses at the beginning and end of the semester, showing significant increase in student knowledge (Luce & Kirnan, 2016). Pretest-posttests can include multiple-choice and short answer questions, along with many other mechanisms that are more time-consuming to evaluate (Rajkumar et al., 2011). A literature review also shows a few examples of how the pretest-posttest design has been successfully used in the context of peer tutoring. Guerra-Martín et al. (2017) used a pretest-posttest design to measure students' perceived gains in academic readiness and study strategies.

Similar designs have been used to effectively illustrate learning gains in various educational contexts, with slight variations in the testing sites, the target populations, and the measured variables (Holliday, 2012; Ismail & Alexander, 2005; Johnson et al., 2014).

In the present study, Florida Atlantic University's Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) was interested in direct assessment to determine the effectiveness of tutoring and SI sessions. Similar to methods used by Fullmer (2012), we used pretests and posttests; however, we gave these tests during the same tutoring session in order to determine whether students are learning from an individual session. External, downstream influences that could affect results were limited, including self-study schedules, lecture attendance, and office hour attendance. We hypothesized that scores would be significantly higher on the posttests, demonstrating that actual student learning occurred during the academic support sessions.

Method

Sample

This study occurred in different classrooms across campus where SI sessions were held and in the Science Learning Center at FAU. During the prescribed assessment weeks, all students who attended an SI or tutoring session related to a course included in the assessment initiative participated in this study. Such convenience sampling was the only feasible sampling method given the center's

current limited staffing and resources. Through inferential statistical analyses, this sample was used to generalize the findings to the target population, which can be defined as undergraduate students at Florida Atlantic University who received SI or tutoring for either Life Science (BSC 1005) or Organic Chemistry 1 (CHM 2210) in the Spring 2023 semester. In this semester, Life Science had 735 students enrolled in three different sections, and Organic Chemistry 1 had 263 students enrolled in two different sections. The rate of earning a D, F, or withdrawing (DFW) from the course for Life Science was 12% in spring 2020, 20% in spring 2021, and 9% in spring 2022. The DFW rate for Organic Chemistry 1 was 14% in spring 2020, 26% in spring 2021, and 45% in spring 2022. We gathered data from a total of 98 students who visited the learning center or attended SI for these courses three separate times during the semester.

Materials

Two experienced and/or CRLA-certified tutors and SI leaders from each course, Life Science and Organic Chemistry 1, produced the open-ended assessment questions and the corresponding correct answers. The authors worked in tandem with the SI leaders/tutors to select three questions for each pretest and posttest. Professional staff selected three assessment weeks during the academic term. The pretest-posttest questions were based on course content from specific weeks from the

course syllabus to ensure that tutors generated questions based on recent lecture material and were not assessing future lectures. It should be noted that although the selected pretest-posttest questions often overlapped with topics present on SI session handouts, none of the pretest-posttest questions were duplications of SI handout questions. Please see Appendix A for a sample of questions used for the pretest-posttest for Organic Chemistry 1 during the third and final round of assessment.

After question selection, the pretests and posttests were printed and provided to participating students by the SI leader or tutor. The actual assessments were labeled as before tutoring and after tutoring or before SI or after SI. This was done to avoid biasing the participants with the actual word “test” or “assessment”. During assessment weeks, we were intentional with the assessment delivery so that the sessions remained academic support sessions and did not morph into assessment sessions. Thus, we spent considerable time coaching the SI leaders on how to deliver the assessments as opening and closing session activities, essentially blending the assessments into the academic support sessions.

Procedure

On the three specified assessment weeks, SI leaders and/or tutors administered the appropriate pretest-posttest assessments during the academic support sessions where they were the SI leader or tutor. Although student names were collected so we could match

the pretests and posttests after the session, we removed all student names and assigned numbers before we scored responses to prevent scorer bias. For the first assessment, we had tutors score responses for full and partial credit, with one tutor scoring the Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring assessments and another scoring the Organic Chemistry 1 SI assessments. Partial credit was given if tutors perceived that the student responses were sufficient to show an understanding of the concept. In contrast, one tutor scored both Life Science tutoring and SI assessments.

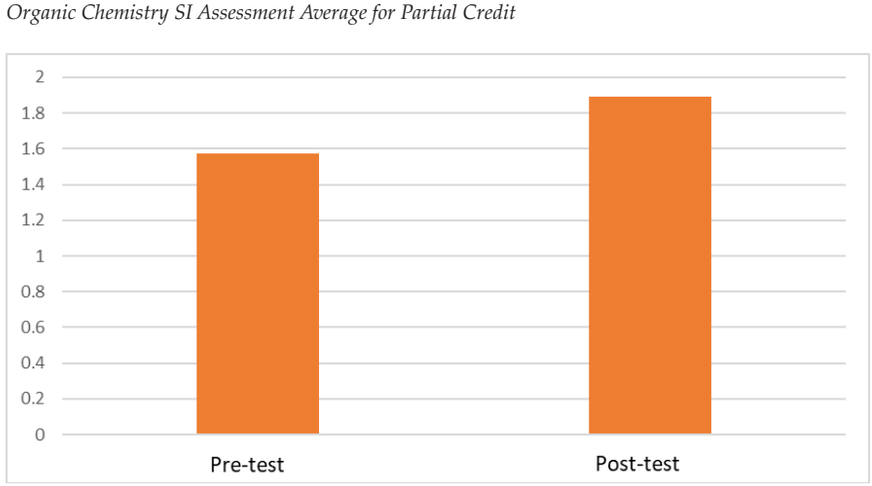
We decided to score for full credit only for the second and third assessments. We decided that although partial credit showed learning gains, it allowed for too much subjectivity in grading the assessments and was not representative of the assessment methods used in the actual courses (no partial credit on exams). Two tutors scored the Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring assessment, and two tutors scored the Organic Chemistry 1 SI assessment. The maximum score was three points for both the pretest and posttest since each question was one point. We used SPSS to run a one-sided paired samples t-test for all assessments to determine if post-test scores were significantly higher. For the second and third assessments, we tested for inter-rater reliability through a reliability analysis that calculated Cronbach's Alpha on SPSS.

Results

First Assessment

There were 33 participants for Organic Chemistry 1 SI assessment, 9 for Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring, 4 in Life Science SI, and no participants for Life Science tutoring. A one-sided paired sample t-test was conducted through SPSS and there were no significant findings for Life Science SI, Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring, or scores for full credit in Organic Chemistry 1 SI. As seen in Figure 1, partial scores were significantly higher for the posttest (M= 1.894, SD=0.647) for Organic Chemistry 1 than for the pretest (M= 1.576, SD= 0.675) ($t(32) = -2.289$, $p=0.014$).

Figure 1
Organic Chemistry SI Assessment Average for Partial Credit



Note: Partial credit post-test scores are significantly higher than pre-test scores.

Second Assessment

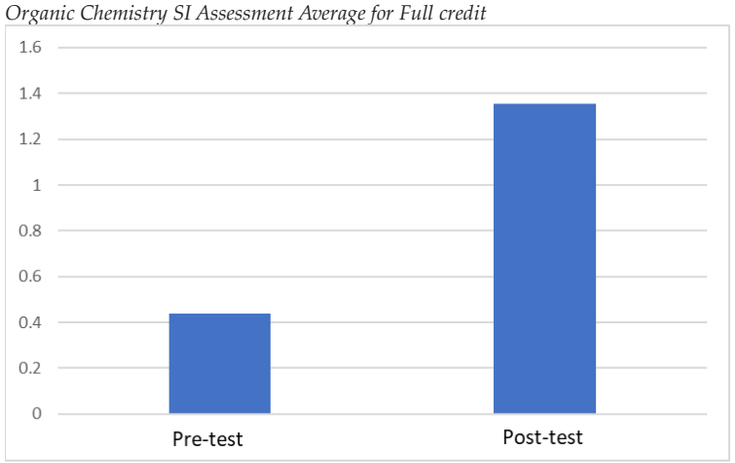
There were 24 participants for Organic Chemistry 1 SI assessment, 3 for Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring, and no participants

for Life Science SI or tutoring. We could not use the Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring data, as there was an error in one of the assessment tests that was discovered after administering the test. In the second assessment, two tutors scored responses based on an answer key. We focused on full credit only, unlike the first assessment which included partial credit and scores from one tutor.

We tested for inter-rater reliability for the two tutors that were grading. For the pretest, Cronbach's alpha was 0.752. For the posttest, Cronbach's alpha was 0.689. After establishing inter-rater reliability, we used the average of the two tutors' scored responses to run a paired samples t-test. As seen in Figure 2, scores were significantly higher for the posttest (M= 1.354, SD=0.714) for Organic Chemistry 1 than for the pretest (M= 0.438, SD= 0.450) (t (23) = -5.689, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 2

Organic Chemistry SI Assessment Average for Full credit



Note. Post-test scores are significantly higher than pre-test scores.

Third Assessment

There were 21 participants for Organic Chemistry 1 SI assessment, 4 for Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring, and no participants for Life Science SI or tutoring. The 4 Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring participants created an extremely small sample size, but two tutors scored responses and we established inter-rater reliability. The posttest scores all matched, and the pretest scores had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.842. We took the average of the tutors' scored pretest responses. Scores were significantly higher for the posttest (M= 3, SD=0) for Organic Chemistry 1 tutoring than for the pretest (M= 1.875, SD= 0.629) (t (3) = -3.576, p=0.019).

For the Organic Chemistry 1 SI sample, we also established inter-rater reliability. For the pretest, Cronbach's alpha was 0.925. For the posttest Cronbach's alpha was 0.931. We took the average of the tutors' scored responses. Scores were significantly higher for the posttest (M= 1.976, SD=1.089) for Organic Chemistry 1 SI than for the pretest (M= 1.214, SD= 0.874) (t(20)= -3.135, p=0.003).

Discussion

Learning centers need to identify the most effective ways to determine if SI and tutoring are accomplishing the goals of helping students learn and become independent learners. Increasing student visits to learning centers is a great accomplishment, and counting student visits is the most widespread assessment measure (Norton & Agee, 2014), but as Trosset et al. (2019) explained, reporting the

amount of student visits is not a measure of effective peer support sessions. The current findings reveal the effectiveness of SI, and that students are gaining a deeper understanding of course content during SI sessions. The hypothesis that scores would be higher on the posttests was supported, but it should be noted that this applied only to SI sessions. Sample sizes for tutoring were too small to draw any conclusions.

The study design could be improved, but we conclude that a short answer pretest and posttest could be used to determine if students are learning during an academic support session. We plan to scale our original assessment plan to include more classes by staggering the assessment weeks as seen in Figure 3. We are not concluding that one tutoring session where a student successfully learns is going to affect their class grade and/or GPA. Similar to Holliday (2012), only the effectiveness of an individual academic support session is supported in our findings. This form of direct assessment during one individual session could be useful to demonstrate that students are learning. Another benefit is that if students are not learning and results are not significant, professional learning center staff can then refine their training programs and operations to better impact student learning. In the case of a flawed academic support session, professional staff can determine if the issue is with the tutor and

retrain the tutor or determine if the problem is with the tutor training program.

Figure 3

Potential for Scaling the Direct Assessment Model

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
CHM 2045					X				X				X		
CHM 2046		X					X				X				
BSC 1010			X			X						X			
BSC 1005				X				X						X	
PHY 2048	X									X					X
PHY 2049		X			X				X						

Note. Potential application of direct assessments to other science courses, including Chemistry 1, Chemistry 2, Biological Principles, Life Science, General Physics 1, and General Physics 2, going in order, top to bottom on the chart. The X represents an assessment week in a particular course, each course will be assessed three times, and assessments are staggered so there is no overlap in assessment weeks.

Another benefit of direct assessment is that results can be used to improve a learning center and help in communicating the effectiveness of a learning center in combination with indirect assessment. CLASS data has primarily focused on utilization, but assessment can add more value to the effectiveness of our center and help in relaying that message to learning center leadership. For CLASS, improving our learning center refers to providing data apart from utilization and DFW rates to demonstrate that students are learning in our learning center. Assessment results, whether

significant or non-significant, could be used to evaluate how our tutors are doing their job. When we attempt to scale up our learning center assessments, we can use the assessment results to evaluate tutor performance. Negative evaluations will result in the tutors shadowing level 3 CRLA certified tutors, the master tutors. If there are multiple sessions that are resulting in nonsignificant results, CLASS will need to reassess the current training and evaluation program. The data we gather will directly or indirectly improve our services, indirectly by informing program expansion proposals, or directly by evaluating and training our tutors by offering better feedback and constructive criticism to our tutors based on assessment results. Results could be communicated internally to learning center leadership and results can also be communicated externally to other learning centers that share a common goal of helping students and a common challenge of demonstrating the impacts a learning center can have on student learning.

Limitations and Future Research

We want to be clear that this case study's pretest and posttest methodology is far from a gold standard in experimental design. Nevertheless, we feel this is a starting point for our direct assessment initiatives and a foundation to build further studies. The two major limitations of our design were the lack of a control group and the inability to control for a pretest interaction effect.

These limitations could be addressed by implementing a randomized pretest-posttest control group design or a randomized Solomon four-group design. However, having a control group in learning center assessment research presents the unique challenge of controlling who can attend tutoring (Norton & Agee, 2014). Furthermore, our assessment initiative only focused on two courses, with small sample sizes. Unlike Fullmer (2012), we did not have a large sample of students because students voluntarily went to tutoring. Pretests and posttests were also given in the same order; however, the study was conducted three separate times, and new questions were used each time. Additionally, pretests and posttests were given during the same tutoring or SI session. This design could be improved by adding a delayed test and testing students weeks later to determine if they retained what they learned in the tutoring or SI session. However, with a delayed test in a learning center, there is no guarantee the same students would return to the SI session or for tutoring, and a delayed test would also result in more variables that cannot be controlled, such as study time outside of the learning center and class lectures.

For the assessment results, inter-rater reliability was expected to be higher because the graders were provided with a rubric, which was supposed to limit subjectivity in grading. Given our inter-rater reliability values, for future assessment semesters we would have

the tutors discuss how they graded and train the tutors at the same time on how to score responses and retrain if necessary.

For future assessments, we want to include more science courses and courses from other disciplines. We would also counterbalance the pretest and posttest questions. Another goal is to have larger sample sizes, especially for tutoring. If we work closely with faculty, we could administer assessments right before exams when a larger number of students attend SI and tutoring. The assessments used included three short answer questions, and there is room for improvement. In some instances, tutor-generated questions can be off topic or too challenging. As explained earlier in the methods section, assessment questions were not duplicating SI handout questions, though the third assessment for organic chemistry did have one identical equation as the SI handout with a different approach to the question. However, we do not attribute significant results to the similarity of the question because we also had significant findings for partial credit in assessment 1 and full credit in assessment 2. In the future, multiple-choice assessments can include more questions, facilitating the grading process since multiple-choice questions are not subjective. However, multiple-choice questions must be written carefully so the correct answer is not obvious. Working with faculty to provide or review multiple-choice questions would be beneficial.

The present assessment study has resulted in an effective method of direct assessment with short answer questions in a science course at a learning center. With this method, learning center administrators can study a sample of courses to determine if individual tutoring or SI sessions benefit student learning. This direct assessment method can be modified and improved over time, a key assessment priority for our learning center moving forward.

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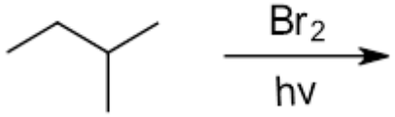
Appendix A
Questions for the Third Organic Chemistry SI Assessment

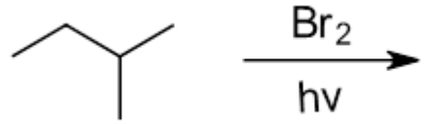
Before SI:

1. Give the major product of the following reaction.



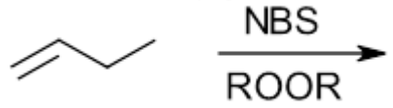
Product:

2. Sketch the mechanism of the first propagation step that would occur during formation of the major product of the reaction below.



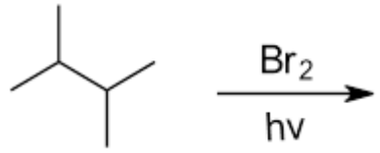
Mechanism:

3. Give the major product of the following reaction.



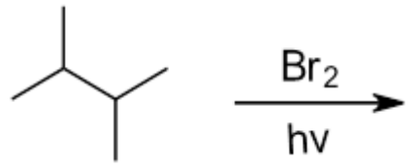
After SI:

1. Give the major product of the following reaction.

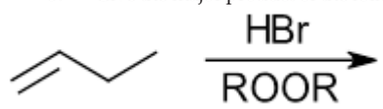


Product:

2. Sketch the mechanism of the first propagation step that would occur during formation of the major product of the reaction below.



3. Give the major product of the following reaction.



An Embedded Tutoring Model

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1 Pima Community College
2 College of Western Idaho
3 Chesapeake College
4 Harrisburg Area Community College

Abstract

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, embedded tutoring became a popular model to address the need for additional student support in higher education. Four U.S. community colleges collaborated to develop a successful embedded tutoring model that provides a framework and definition for embedded tutoring and training for tutors and participating instructors that sets boundaries and uses active classroom learning. The model reviews best practices and how to use data to increase program effectiveness. Finally, it addresses potential challenges as institutions establish an embedded tutoring program.

Keywords: *embedded tutoring, active learning, learning centers, student support, tutoring*

An Embedded Tutoring Model

In recent years, colleges and universities have taken a greater interest in integrating support and success tools into the classrooms

to increase retention and persistence. Institution-provided tutoring is a logical place to start as research has shown it enhances student success (Kostecki & Bers, 2008; Comfort & McMahon, 2014; Ticknor et al., 2014). Numerous studies have also shown that active learning increases student understanding and retention of academic material (French & Westler, 2019; Krishnan et al., 2021; McLain et al., 2023), and a study by Birk et al. (2019) found evidence that active learning may positively impact lower socioeconomic student success the most.

Embedded tutoring (Krishnan et al., 2023; Miller, 2020), though not a new concept, rose to prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic when many tutoring centers had to pivot from a drop-in tutoring model and rethink the way they offered their services. Most students had to embrace a new way of living and adjust to learning solely through the computer, so it was important to put more support services, such as tutoring, at their fingertips. Embedded tutoring builds on the concepts of Supplemental Instruction (SI), a model developed by the University of Kansas City in 1973 that improves student outcomes by introducing structured active learning outside the classroom (Hurley et al., 2006), but allows more flexibility for the tutor inside and outside the classroom and relies on active learning to happen inside the classroom.

This paper will present a framework for synchronous embedded tutoring created by four community colleges in the United States, discuss data collection for the institution's program, and address common challenges. The framework will define embedded tutoring; examine the differences between embedded tutoring, traditional tutoring, supplemental instruction, and teaching assistants; discuss the course selection process; describe ways to train instructors and tutors; examine data collection and analysis; and review best practices.

Group Participants

In the summer of 2022, a survey was sent to the Learning Center Professionals Listserv moderated by the University of Florida inviting anyone interested in embedded tutoring to participate. Forty-two schools responded: 10 from four-year private schools, 11 from four-year public schools, and 21 from two-year public schools. Twenty-seven of those schools were already using embedded tutoring: 17 schools embedded tutors in fewer than 10 courses per semester, five embedded tutors in 10-25 sections, two embedded tutors in 25-50, two embedded tutors in 50-100 sections, and one school embedded tutors in over 100 sections per semester. All five schools that embed tutors in at least 25 courses per semester were two-year public colleges, and four of these institutions consented to form a working group. The results from this initial survey were used to begin the discussion and the four participating community

colleges brought together their knowledge and experience to create this embedded tutoring framework.

Chesapeake College

Chesapeake College is located on Maryland's Eastern Shore and serves five counties which make up the largest geographic area served by a community college in its state. The students served are diverse, with many first-generation who experience little or no academic support outside of the college services offered. Enrollment in the fall of 2022 was 5,005. Seventy-six percent of the students in credit programs attend on a part-time basis, which calculates the enrolled full-time student equivalent (FTE) for credit students to 1,573. The average age of students is 22 and the median age is 19. Females make up 67% of the student body (Chesapeake College, 2023).

The Academic Support Center coordinates most tutoring on campus. Typically, Chesapeake employs 20-25 part-time temporary tutors (those with degrees) and 5-7 student tutors. Four full-time lead tutors, supervised by the director, organize and schedule the tutors covering the subject areas of mathematics, science, nursing, technology, and writing. The Academic Support Center also oversees tutoring services at the College's satellite location in Cambridge, Maryland.

Chesapeake College has incorporated embedded tutors (ETs) for several years in science labs and nursing. Traditionally ETs

are requested by the instructor, with a small, dedicated body of instructors routinely participating in the partnership. The Academic Support Center specifically targets developmental and dual-enrolled sections for ET placement. Peer tutors make up the bulk of ETs and are embedded in science labs, while those embedded in the learning management system (LMS) are professional temporary tutors (non-students), largely due to instructor concerns about access to course content within the LMS. Each semester, 16-18 ETs support approximately 44-60 sections.

Chesapeake has seen a steady increase in embedded tutoring since 2018, both in the classroom and virtual modalities. In the fall of 2018 ETs were placed in 18 courses, primarily science labs. Throughout the pandemic, Chesapeake continued to invest in embedded tutoring and by the fall of 2022 ETs were included in 52 courses in both classroom and virtual modalities. Since the pandemic, Chesapeake is undergoing a paradigm shift regarding student retention and completion, and mandatory tutoring is a major part of the conversation. In the spring of 2023, the college administration decided to assign ETs to specific developmental courses rather than by instructor request. Although this practice needs further development, it is helping to strengthen the Academic Support Center's role in developing new relationships with instructors who were once reluctant to have an ET.

College of Western Idaho

The College of Western Idaho (CWI) is located in the Treasure Valley of Western Idaho and consists of two main campuses in Boise and Nampa. During the 2021-2022 academic year, there were 30,210 students served. Ninety-two percent of students were enrolled part-time, 53% of students were female, and the average student age was 21 years old. There were 118 programs: 47 academic transfer, 51 career and technical education, 17 workforce development, and three adult education. Courses were offered in a variety of options including in-person, online synchronous, online asynchronous, and hybrid (College of Western Idaho, 2022).

CWI Tutoring Services is part of a Learning Commons which includes the Library, Tutoring Services, and the Writing Center. There are currently four tutoring centers and five main discipline areas of support: career and technical education (CTE); English language learners; humanities and social sciences; science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); and writing. CWI employs 60-100 part-time tutors year-round, depending on student demand and funding availability.

Prior to 2020, CWI Tutoring Services was almost entirely drop-in with ETs in a few CTE and STEM courses. However, in response to the pandemic, embedded tutoring increased to over 100 sections per semester. CWI Tutoring Services is now fine-

tuning the embedded tutoring model using lessons learned over the past three years, while trying to balance embedded tutoring's scope with the other tutoring services offered. Interested instructors now fill out an application describing the student need for an ET in their courses and how they plan to utilize the ET. Supervisors match ETs to classes based on student need, funding, and tutor availability and then require the ET and instructor to complete a training module that culminates with a signed contract before the ET can begin.

Harrisburg Area Community College

Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) is located in Central Pennsylvania and consists of five physical campuses (Gettysburg, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Lebanon, and York) in addition to offering remote and virtual learning options for students. Enrollment for the fall of 2022 saw an unduplicated headcount of 12,576 students, with 67.3% identifying as female (Harrison Area Community College, 2023). Tutoring services offered at HACC consist of in-person, drop-in tutoring at all five campuses, online tutoring over Zoom, and asynchronous tutoring through the HACC Online Writing Lab (HOWL). HACC has approximately 70 tutors including peer (current students or recent graduates) and professional (minimum of a bachelor's degree).

Embedded tutoring was first piloted at select HACC campuses in the mid to late 2010s through grant funding and was eventually incorporated into the HACC 2019-2022 Strategic Plan (Harrisburg

Area Community College, 2022). The goal was to embed tutors in gateway and high-risk courses in attempts to improve the institution's retention and completion rates.

By the fall of 2020, following the onset of the pandemic, the College had fully transitioned into a one-college model, and oversight of embedded tutoring shifted from a campus specific model to a college-wide model. Consequently, and in conjunction with the Strategic Plan, embedded tutoring support was able to expand, primarily in the disciplines of biology, English, and mathematics. Currently, HACC offers embedded tutoring in nearly all modalities, including in-person, remote (i.e., Zoom classes), blended classes, and virtual/asynchronous classes. On average, there are typically between 15 and 20 ETs, each supporting one or more course sections.

Pima Community College

Pima Community College (PCC) is located Tucson, Arizona. It is made up of five larger campuses and a few smaller centers. With 48.2% of the student population identifying as Hispanic or Latino, Pima is a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Enrollment in the fall of 2022 was 17,014, with 56.9% of the student population being female and only 30.1% of the student population taking 12 or more credit hours (Pima Community College, 2023).

The Learning Centers (LCs) coordinate tutors at the College except for those who are grant funded. PCC employs about 75-100 tutors across five in-person campus LCs and one virtual LC. Each center has its own Assistant Program Manager that oversees their campus in-person tutors as well as the ETs for the courses at their location.

PCC Learning Centers started a limited exploration of in-class support for students over 10 years ago with SI and "Tutor Linked" courses, but neither resulted in consistent student success or instructor support. In the fall of 2019, the LCs began experimenting with a new in-class support model that it termed "Embedded Tutoring" with a pilot group of select courses. In the summer and fall of 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, the LCs were able to make a more concerted effort to embed tutors in many of the developmental courses due to a consolidation of tutors and resources into a single LC and increased tutor availability. Initially, ETs were placed in any course, regardless of modality, but over time, the asynchronous ETs were phased out due to a lack of utilization. In the fall of 2021, the LCs, with the support of the college deans, began an instructor and tutor training program, which became the deciding factor in who could request and use an ET. Currently, instructors or courses that use active learning are the ones being selected by LCs for embedded tutoring. Each semester, there are 20-25 ETs covering 70-85 sections. Most of the ETs at PCC

are peers who have previously taken the course with the instructor, so they are familiar with the instructor, their teaching and grading style, and the content of the course.

Embedded Tutoring Framework

It was identified early in the group discussions that there was a lack of research on embedded tutoring as a model. After researching, reviewing the Learning Center Professionals listserv survey, and discussing as a group, the four participating colleges decided to analyze their own embedded tutoring models and create a list of best practices for those interested in learning about and implementing embedded tutoring. Through the next several months, the group presented two well-attended webinars about those best practices. After taking into consideration the comments and discussions from attendees, the following framework was created.

Definition of Embedded Tutoring

There are many working definitions of embedded tutoring, but, for this model, an ET attends synchronous classes regularly, providing individualized attention and assistance during active learning activities to help clarify course concepts while motivating students' participation and engagement in the classroom. The ET also provides open tutoring hours outside of class to provide extra assistance and further engage the students with available academic resources.

Different Types of Support

Confusion between the different types of student support can create problems with the expectations and boundaries of the ET's role. In general, the difference between a traditional tutor and an ET is that the ET targets tutoring support to students in their specific course(s) each semester, while the traditional tutor can work with any student who comes into the tutoring center. An ET and a teaching assistant (TA) differ in that the ET's main objective is student support while a TA is there as instructor support. Lastly, the primary distinction between an SI leader and an ET is that the SI leader provides supplemental instruction and active learning outside of class in structured group sessions, while the ET can help facilitate learning activities inside the classroom and facilitate group study sessions or one-on-one appointments. Table 1 shows some other differences to distinguish between the models.

Table 1
Differences in activities of various support models

Activity	Type of Support			
	ET	SI	TA	Tutor
Regularly attend classes and facilitate active learning activities	X	X	X	
Participate in small group discussions or discussions through LMS	X		X	
Provides open tutoring hours outside of class	X			X
Can create/deliver review sessions outside of class	X	X	X	X
Administrative work (grading, attendance, lectures)			X	
Best if previous student in class with instructor	X	X		

Course Selection

Courses with high failure rates (D, F, or W grades), gateway, introductory, and developmental courses are good places to start for determining what courses to embed tutors. Strategic plans with instructional support goals and objectives are another way. A variety of factors, including level of student engagement (with tutor and the course), tutor availability, course delivery style (synchronous or asynchronous), instructional style (i.e., traditional lecture vs. flipped classroom), and funding, also impact which classes are selected for embedded tutoring.

Training for an Embedded Tutoring Program

The four institutions saw variation over the years in the ways ETs were utilized by instructors at their institution, and each implemented some kind of instructor and/or tutor training. The group analyzed these trainings and determined the key components needed to support a successful tutor and instructor-embedded tutoring training program.

Tutor Training

There are five key components for successful ET training: defining embedded tutoring, establishing expectations, clarifying policies/procedures, providing guidance on using boundaries, and teaching about active learning. Use active learning techniques during the training and check-in with the ETs when

the training is complete to confirm and reinforce their understanding of the job duties and responsibilities.

Definition. Discuss the purpose of ETs and why the institution has decided to utilize them. Defining embedded tutoring helps to give the background and context they need to be invested in the bigger picture.

Expectations. Go through all the expectations of the ET. Even though something seems obvious, it may not be to the ET. Some examples of expectations and the rationale:

- *Attend every class and participate in active learning activities*. This allows the ET to know what happens in the classroom, review materials, and work with the students during class to build trust and rapport and clarify immediate trouble areas.
- *Hold open tutoring hours outside of class.* Open hours allow students extra time to work with the ET in a more one-on-one setting to work on their specific areas of concern.
- *Model good student behaviors*. This helps the students learn what behaviors they should be utilizing in the classroom to be successful.
- *Be proactive and make every attempt to get to know the students.* Building that rapport with the students is key in getting the students to see the value in the ET.
- *Communicate with students, instructor, and supervisor.* An ET's role is most effective when they are actively communicating with

the students and the instructor. They must also maintain communication with the supervisor to confirm they are fulfilling their job responsibilities.

- *Collect required data.* Include any specifics the institution requires, like filling out tutor logs, which may help gather data needed to see if the program is succeeding or not.

During this conversation, include what is not expected of the ET and why. Examples of these include:

- *Do not ignore the instructor's lecture by surfing the internet, playing on your phone, etc.* This does not model good student behaviors.
- *Do not substitute for the instructor.* The ET is not trained as an instructor nor do they get paid the same as the instructor. It is also crucial to minimize the power dynamic between the ET and the students.
- *Do not grade or discuss questions regarding the grading of assignments.* ETs should be seen more as peers to the students than someone who has control over the outcome of the class so that students feel more comfortable coming and talking to them about their insecurities or struggles in the class.
- *Do not enforce classroom discipline.* The instructor is responsible for classroom management, and the tutor should avoid involvement to limit the power dynamic between them and the students.

- *Do not proctor exams.* Again, this is a power dynamic and grade issue that the ET should avoid.
- *Do not run errands.* ETs are not there to help the instructor; they are there to help the students succeed.
- *Do not teach or create new content.* Teaching should be left to the instructor. ETs are there to support the students and clarify material that the students have learned but are struggling with.

The ET needs to fully understand what to do and not do to ensure they are working within their job duties and not being asked to take on the responsibilities of the instructor.

Take time to explain to the ET the expectations of the instructor and the supervisor as well. The ET is often working away from the normal tutoring space and they need to know what each person is responsible for if they have questions. The more information the ETs have, the more comfortable they will be.

Policies/Procedures. Briefly remind the ETs about following all the institution's employee policies and procedures, such as filling out timesheets, wearing ID badges, or completing the institution's mandated training. While the ET's main focus is on students and helping them succeed, they are still employees and are required to do certain things outside of tutoring.

Discuss the specific policies or procedures for the program that the ET needs to know. For example, the institution may require that the ETs hold open tutoring hours outside of class just for those

students, so explain how many hours they are allowed, where and when they can hold them, and what they can do during those hours. Go over any data collection needs and walk them through any forms that must be filled out. Explain why the data collection is required.

Communication is a very important part of making this program successful because the ETs work outside of the tutoring space, so it is worth mentioning again in this part of the training. Identify who the ET should be communicating with (instructor, staff, etc.) for different things, how often, and the best method of communication (email, phone, in-person, etc.).

Boundaries. Tutors, by nature, are typically people that want to be helpful, so include a conversation about, and stress the importance of, having boundaries to protect their mental health and keep students from taking advantage of their kindness. Boundaries are also necessary to limit or eliminate inappropriate behavior from either person in the situation. Examples of boundaries and their rationale:

- *ETs have set times when they work and get paid.* They should be paid for the time they are working with students and should not be expected to monitor or respond to students (or instructors) when they are off the clock. For many, it is difficult to say no if approached for help when they are not working, so giving them tools to help create these boundaries will make them feel more comfortable saying no. One way to do this is setting up an auto-response reply on their work email that lists their work schedule and that they will respond when they return to work. This relieves the pressure or anxiety the ET may feel to respond to an email right away and lets the student know when it is reasonable to expect a response.

- *Relationships should be kept neutral and respectful between student and ET as well as between ET and supervisor*. ETs can be seen by students as authoritative figures and key to their success in college. This view creates a power dynamic between the student and ET. If an ET tries pursuing a romantic relationship with a student, there can be quid pro quo implications inferred from this scenario. It can also present an image to others that this student is getting preferential treatment by the ET. The same can be said of the ET-supervisor relationship.
- *The relationship between the ET and instructor should be defined.* Begin with a meeting to discuss expectations, communication parameters, and establish boundaries early. This may also include a rundown of roles between the instructor and ET as well as who students should go to depending on the nature of their question(s). For example, content-related questions could be answered by either individual, while questions pertaining to grades or attendance should be directed to the instructor.

- *Keep work and home life separate.* ETs and students should not exchange personal phone numbers or emails. This helps to ensure lines don't get blurred and boundaries are maintained.

Active Learning. Explain what active learning is and what it could look like in the classroom so the ET feels more prepared for what they might see. Take the training itself as an opportunity to model active learning. Utilize different methods like group conversation, flipped classroom, or gamification to present the information and make it more interactive (see further reading section for more ideas). This is a great way to make the training more fun and engaging while also seeing what the ETs already know and discussing what they may not understand in more detail.

Comprehension Check. Once ETs have completed this training, confirm they have internalized the material and feel comfortable going into the classroom for the semester. Give the ETs a quiz or reflection assignment to show what they know. This will identify ETs that may need some follow-up before letting them start.

Instructor Training

Definition. There are multiple programs that place extra resources into the classroom, and it is important to clearly establish with the instructor what the institution's program is for. Embedded tutoring can often be confused with SI, teaching

assistants, and academic coaches, so clarifying the ET's function will ensure instructors understand the role and use of an ET in the classroom. Reinforce that the purpose of the ET is to support the students in the classroom, not the instructor.

Expectations. Knowing the expectations of the instructor, supervisor, and ET is essential for each person in the collaboration. Take time to explain exactly what is required of the instructor. Some examples of expectations for an instructor are:

- *Regularly integrate the ET into activities in the classroom.* The ET is there to work with the students and the material together as much as possible.
- *Introduce and emphasize the ETs purpose and role in the classroom at the beginning of the course.* The earlier the ET can be integrated into the class as a regular part of the course, the better the chance that students will see the importance of utilizing their services.
- *Communicate with the ET and supervisor.* Communication is vital to ensure the success of the program.
- *Train ETs on specific technology required for the class.* Supervisors are unlikely to be familiar with all classroom technology and software needed for each course.

Additionally, include what the instructor is not expected to do. Examples of this include:

- *Do not hire ETs.* While the instructor may refer a student to become an ET, it is still up to the supervisor to evaluate and ultimately hire the potential ET.
- *Do not supervise the ET.* The instructor's job is to oversee the classroom and course content, not train, schedule, and evaluate the ET.

Be sure to also spend a good amount of time on the expectations of the ET (same ones outlined in the ET training). The instructor should fully understand the ET's function so they do not ask them to work outside of their role. Being thorough with each job's expectations holds everyone accountable for the success of the program.

Active Learning. Define what active learning is and give a few examples. Not every instructor understands active learning or utilizes it in their classroom. As with the ET training, the training itself can be an opportunity to model active learning. Utilize different methods like group conversation, flipped classroom, or gamification to present the information and make it more interactive (see further reading section for more ideas). This is a great way to make the training more fun and engaging while also seeing what the instructors already know and discussing what they may not understand in more detail. It might also give the instructors ideas on how to incorporate active learning into their classroom.

Certification and Comprehension Check. The instructor training should be mandatory before approving the placement of an ET in the instructor's course(s). Labeling the instructor training as a certification may help increase its importance and value to the instructors. The certification should be renewed periodically to refresh the instructor's knowledge of the expectations and details of the program as well as inform them of any new improvements or changes.

After instructors have completed this certification course, verify that they have internalized the material and feel comfortable knowing how to integrate an ET into their classroom. Give the instructors a quiz as a comprehension checks as well as a reflection assignment describing how they plan to use the ET. This will identify anyone that may need some follow-up before completing their certification and approving them to have an ET in their classroom.

Implementation

When implementing both training sessions, it is best to do them as synchronous sessions. This will verify that the ETs and instructors are taking the time to go through the material, engage with it, and have meaningful conversations with other instructors or ETs and the supervisor.

House the training materials where the ET and instructor can refer to them, such as a course in the institution's LMS. Most ETs

and instructors will already be comfortable using the LMS, and for those who are not (specifically the ETs), it gives them the opportunity to learn a program they will be asked to use in the classroom. Using the LMS will also give a platform to do the comprehension checks, reflection assignments, or any other activities the institution chooses to incorporate in the training.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis is an integral part of any embedded tutoring program. It is through this data that tutoring centers can determine if the ET is making an impact on the students in the class(es) they are embedded in. To capture the impact of the ET holistically, it is recommended that both quantitative and qualitative data be collected and analyzed.

Quantitative data can often be conceptualized into two categories, institutional and departmental data. Institutional data may consist of course failure rates (D, F, and W grades), student retention rates, and other high-priority data that would interest the overall institution. This may also involve creating operational definitions of terms such as "success" or "retention" in the context of the data. For example, does "retention" in the context of a community college mean the student registers for courses during the next semester or within the next academic year, or maybe even enrolls at a four-year institution? In order to establish consistency in operational definitions, it is

recommended that tutoring centers collaborate with their college's institutional research department to collect this data.

Similarly, departmental data relates more closely to the tutoring center itself. This often takes the form of tracking the number of tutoring visits from a certain class (with the ET or even generally) using tracking software or other resources. Some of the departmental data may also be useful at the institutional level, so it is valuable to track how many classes have ETs in respective disciplines. It is also important to clarify what "success" means, as the institution may inquire what kind of impact is being made in classes with an ET compared to those without. Tutoring centers may also consider exploring how students who interact with the ET (in and/or out of class) perform compared to those who do not by tracking in-class interactions and synchronous and asynchronous out-of-class interactions.

The process of tracking what happens in class can be a bit more challenging, as there are a few additional questions to consider. Do we track time spent assisting with active learning activities? What constitutes a substantial interaction in the class? How do we account for interactions when the instructor requires students to work with the tutor? Does the instructor want to assist with collecting data for their reference as well? Each of these questions are key considerations for a tutoring center to answer to ensure that the data being collected is valuable.

Qualitative data is equally essential, as it can enhance the quantitative data by capturing information the latter cannot. It is highly recommended that feedback be sought from three main sources: the students, the instructor, and the ET. By triangulating the data from these sources, a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the ET can be established. It also allows for multiple perspectives on what practices did or did not appear successful.

There are several common examples of questions that are used to survey students who have had an ET in their class. For example, did the student receive tutoring, and if so, what kind of tutoring and how frequently? If the student did not use tutoring, following up with a question asking what would make them more likely to use tutoring in the future can provide beneficial feedback. It can also be valuable to ask students to describe their experience working with the ET. This can capture the students' perspectives on how approachable and accessible ET was both in and out of the classroom. Another question that can be asked is the extent to which the ET's comments align with the instructor's expectations, which can indicate if students perceive the instructor and ET to be "on the same page."

It should also be noted that open-ended questions provide students the chance to give more comprehensive feedback. For example, a question may ask students to describe how having an

ET in their class has (or has not) impacted their experience in that course. This type of feedback can also serve as "testimonials" indicative of a positive impact on individual students, even if the aggregated quantitative data does not seem to show an impact overall. This is why it can be critical for the institution and tutoring center to collect qualitative data in addition to the quantitative data.

When surveying the ET, several areas of questions should be addressed. For example, did the ET feel that the students benefited from their help in and out of the class? Were there disparities in how utilized the ET felt in versus out of class? Did students seek ET in or out of class, and what trends did they notice? Did they feel their time in the classroom or during open tutoring hours was well spent? Was communication with the instructor adequate for optimizing student support? It can also be important to collect suggestions from ETs on what seemed to work and what did not (open-ended questions). This information provides an opportunity to learn exactly how the ET was incorporated into the class, especially if other instructors that are potentially interested in having an ET are looking for advice or strategies for incorporating an ET into classes. Furthermore, these questions can also be used to verify that the ET is being used within the parameters of their role.

With a few minor revisions, the same questions asked of the ETs could also be used for the instructors. By comparing respective instructor and ET responses to questions such as "how was the ET

incorporated in class" or "did you feel the communication with the ET was adequate," a more holistic picture of that partnership can be seen. It can also help with addressing concerns such as a perceived lack of adequate communication or clear expectations. On the other hand, it can also provide a sense of how well certain partnerships function when pairing ETs and instructors in the future. As with students and ETs, open-ended questions provide the opportunity for the instructors to openly identify both successes and areas that need improvement.

Best Practices

Best practices are identified through trial and error and will fine-tune a program. Following those practices will bolster the success of the ET program and, ultimately, the support and success of students. The following best practices were identified by the four institutions; some of which have been described in greater detail throughout the framework.

The roles of supervisors, ETs, and instructors should be collaborative with frequent communication to adjust interactions and enrich the student experience. One thing that cannot be overstressed is that the ET is there as a support for the students not for the instructor, so review each role prior to adding ETs to courses. Incorporating some of the major expectations and job duties into an ET agreement form for the team to review before

the semester begins can help foster a positive and impactful experience for students and their learning.

Supervisors establish, organize, and create connections between the ETs and instructors. They provide support to ETs and instructors with initial discussion and training on responsibilities and expectations for each role as well as best practices that support a vibrant relationship. Though it is easy to overlook, make sure to include a review of expectations and boundaries with previously established ET-instructor pairings, as it is easy to start bending the rules and ETs may end up working outside of their job duties. It is also up to the supervisor to establish checkpoints throughout the semester with the ETs and instructors. These checkpoints are needed to assess how the embedded process is going and adjust as needed. At least one checkpoint should be a classroom observation during the semester to verify expectations are being followed by all parties, while others could be quick emails or one-on-one conversations. This is crucial for ETs or instructors who are new to the embedded experience.

Instructors should see the ET as a partner with an important role: to foster engagement between the students and course content, creating the best experience for the students. Instructors should identify key places in the course where the ET will actively be incorporated into the classroom activities. This plan should be shared with the ET early in the semester to set the groundwork for a

successful partnership and reinforced in their check-ins throughout the semester. Instructors should introduce the ET to the class during the first week of the semester so that students are aware of the ETs existence and role in the class. Students need to be aware that the ET is a valuable resource to assist them in the assignments, which will lead to better critical thinking and, ultimately, independent learning.

ETs should attend all synchronous classes and create and maintain a presence in the LMS course when possible. ETs are highlighted in the LMS for students and their role in the LMS is to participate in discussion boards and access email to contact students as needed, which makes them available and visible. Active and frequent communication helps create relationships with the students and can help even reluctant students reach out for tutoring support services. It is imperative that the ET be reliable, respectful, and ethical in all these interactions.

ETs should keep track of their interactions with students both while embedded inside the classroom and in outside sessions. Statistics gathered during the semester should be analyzed to identify trends, adjustments, and scheduling needs. Data analysis can be especially meaningful in identifying specific courses where students tend to struggle and could benefit from having access to an ET for future semesters.

ETs and instructors should advocate the institution's support services and direct students as appropriate every chance they get. Not only does this create more awareness of tutoring services, but it makes it more likely that students will seek further assistance in the tutoring center or online outside of class. In some programs, especially developmental courses, it may be possible for instructors and ETs to identify areas students may need additional help and resources that may fall outside the academic scope of the course syllabus, such as time management or study skills. These areas can be addressed by the ETs or the tutoring center outside of the class in sessions specific to the needs of the student.

At the end of the course, it is key to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program and what aspects can be improved. Both in-person meetings and feedback surveys are a great way to collect this information. In addition to instructor and ET feedback, student feedback is also vital to the growth of the program, so they should be surveyed as well.

Other Challenges

Funding

One of the biggest challenges to starting and maintaining an embedded tutoring program is funding. Paying ETs to attend class and spend time preparing for group and individual appointments takes more hours than drop-in or appointment-only models. This will vary by institution, but funding seems to fit into three

categories: grants, institutional, and other. Common grants include Perkins for career and technical education support and National Science Foundation grants for STEM support, among others. Many institutions have grant offices that can assist in finding and applying for these opportunities. Institutional funds come from existing tutor budgets and initiatives. Programs should start small, and the positive data generated from embedded tutoring pilot programs can help encourage leadership to invest more into tutoring. Other funding includes internal foundation and alumni support as well as any other creative ways programs can generate more funds.

Integration with Other Support Models

Not every institution has the same support models, so integration with other student services will vary. To be accessible to diverse student populations, a balance between in-person and remote modalities is needed as well as a balance between embedded tutoring/SI, drop-in tutoring, and appointment-based tutoring. Start small by using data to decide where to place ETs and where to keep them. There is no perfect ratio, so it will be an ongoing process of balancing services based on student needs and funding.

Encouraging ET Usage

Having an instructor willing to incorporate the use of the ET as part of the grade on an assignment or giving extra credit if the

student gets help from the ET are some of the best ways to get the students to utilize the ET. If either of these are done early in the semester, it can help the ET build rapport and trust with the students and increases the likelihood of them coming back again throughout the semester. It is also critical to make sure that the time the ET is available for the students outside of class matches when many of the students are available. At the beginning of the semester, have the tutor discuss options or poll the students to determine the best times for the out of class tutoring hours. If students are still not utilizing the ET outside of class, take some time to determine why.

Gaining Instructor Support

Start by finding a few instructors that are supportive of tutoring (especially ones with tutoring backgrounds) and they will spread the word. Giving a presentation to instructors about what ETs are and do can be helpful. Lastly, getting institution administrators onboard by sharing data about increased retention and completion goals can help encourage instructors to use ETs.

ET Recruitment

The best way to recruit ETs is through instructor referrals. ET-instructor pairings are often more successful if the instructor is already familiar with the ET and the ET is familiar with the instructor and how the course is taught. Other ways are targeting

students of specific majors, general job postings, and by current tutors referring new tutors.

Embedded Tutoring for Asynchronous Courses

Asynchronous embedded tutoring, although more challenging and not considered a best practice, can be successful in the right situations. Asynchronous ETs may have more success if intentional opportunities for engagement existed within the course. Examples include video introductions, utilizing LMS discussion boards, having the ET create weekly videos, and/or requiring synchronous meetings with the ET during virtual open tutoring hours. Some institutions have a different name for tutors who embed in asynchronous courses such as “linked” or “designated” to avoid confusion.

Conclusion

Embedded tutoring should not operate in a vacuum with only tutoring center and instructor involvement. Focusing on the larger picture and how ETs support retention and completion must be considered and combined with advocacy and support from administrators and other student support departments. For those that work in higher education learning support, the importance of tutoring and how it shapes academic success and enriches the student experience cannot be overstated. Embedded tutoring brings tutors to where students are and provides help and awareness for other student support services. Training is

essential to bring all components of embedded tutoring in line with best practices. The embedded tutoring programs in the four institutions mentioned may vary in structure and implementation, but they all focus on the connections ETs make with the students and strive for student success.

Analyzing data and feedback is critical to maintain a program that is relevant and fulfills the program goals. Evaluation and continuous improvement help to maximize the limited resources the institution has provided. There are many unknowns in the future that may put increasing demands on tutoring services, including embedded tutoring. Balancing tutoring resources with needs may be more difficult if funding and resources do not keep up with demand.

The COVID-19 pandemic had major impacts on tutoring services, forcing most to embrace the virtual and asynchronous possibilities that many hadn't ventured into yet. This catalyst, along with the growing changes in education to implement support services in the classroom has allowed tutoring to rise to the forefront of the conversation on student success and retention. With increases in embedded tutoring, virtual, and asynchronous options and the return back to in-person tutoring services, tutoring is more accessible to all students than ever before.

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Impact of Academic Support on Junior Student Retention in a Turkish University

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Abstract

At English Medium Instruction (EMI) universities, where the English language is used to teach academic subjects in countries where the first language of the majority of the population is not English, students are required to undertake a preparatory year English language program before they are permitted to commence their chosen field of study. The issue of keeping students enrolled in these mandatory language programs is notably challenging. As a result, the initial year of the university becomes a critical period where the likelihood of students leaving is higher. Compared to the ample resources available in the subsequent years of college, the institution's support for first-year students in language programs is comparatively limited. This research aimed to analyze the contrast in retention rates between junior students who had access to comprehensive academic support services and those who didn't, using a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. We sought to investigate the impact of

academic support services on the retention rates of junior students at a Turkish university. A total of 430 junior students representing diverse academic disciplines participated in the study, with the autonomy to choose whether to engage with academic support services or solely rely on conventional university support. We used a chi-square test of independence to analyze whether there was a significant association between engaging with academic support services and retention rates. Our findings demonstrated a statistically significant association between utilizing these services and improved retention. Qualitative insights further illuminated students' underlying motivations and commitments, attributing their academic success and sustained enrollment to the diverse support services and resources utilized. In summary, our mixed-methods study underscores the pivotal role of academic support services in fostering student engagement and retention within the Turkish university context and provides a nuanced understanding of how these services positively influence students' educational experiences.

Keywords: academic support services, student retention, English medium instruction, junior students

Impact of Academic Support on Junior Student Retention in a Turkish University

Introduction

Any educational institution's success and long-term sustainability are significantly related to its ability to retain and support its student population. In recent years, student retention and attrition have become critical concerns for universities worldwide (Maher & Macallister, 2013), and Turkey is no exception. Junior students, in particular, are often vulnerable to attrition due to academic challenges, adjustment issues, and a lack of adequate support systems (Evans & Morrison, 2011). In response to this pressing issue, academic support services have emerged as potential solutions to encourage student engagement, academic performance, and retention rates.

At English medium universities, where the English language is used to teach academic subjects in countries in which English is not the official language and in which the students' first language is not English, the challenges of student retention are even more dramatic due to the prerequisite of a gatekeeper language program (Evans & Morrison, 2011). Before commencing their undergraduate programs, students must undergo a preparatory English program to develop the necessary language proficiency for academic success in English medium instruction. While this preparatory program equips students with essential language skills before entering their

undergrad programs, its successful completion remains a critical milestone. Consequently, the role of academic support services becomes even more crucial.

Seeing that the effectiveness of academic support services in addressing the academic needs of students in universities has become a topic of significant interest and research, we decided to provide tailored interventions—academic tutoring, workshops, and language conversation practice sessions. Academic support services have the potential to foster a supportive learning environment that helps students overcome academic challenges and adjust to the demands of English medium instruction. We were motivated to investigate the impact of academic support services on student retention, academic performance, and overall satisfaction can offer valuable insights to optimize support systems and ensure the success of junior students in their academic journey.

The present study aims to investigate the impact of academic support services on the retention/attrition rates of junior students in an English preparatory program at a prominent university in Turkey. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, our study assessed the effectiveness of academic support services in enhancing retention and cultivating a conducive learning environment for junior students. Employing a mixed research design, we contrasted the retention rates of two distinct groups: a group that

engaged in academic support services and resources, and another group that did not. Ultimately, this investigation aimed to contribute valuable insights to the existing literature on student retention and enhance the understanding of effective support structures for junior students in English medium instruction higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Student retention and attrition have emerged as critical areas of concern for universities worldwide (Adusei-Asante & Doh, 2016), reflecting the pivotal role of higher education in shaping individual careers and contributing to societal progress. In recent years, researchers and educational institutions have devoted significant attention to understanding the factors influencing student retention and identifying effective strategies to promote academic persistence. Numerous studies have highlighted the multi-dimensional nature of student retention and attrition, with factors ranging from academic preparedness, financial constraints, campus climate, and social integration to academic and social support systems (Tinto, 1975; Bean, 1980; Braxton et al., 2000). Junior students, in particular, face unique challenges as they navigate the transition from introductory coursework to more specialized disciplines, which can impact their decision to continue their academic journey (Ghosh, 2017).

Within these challenges, academic support services have emerged as valuable resources, addressing students' academic and social needs, enhancing engagement, and promoting academic success (Cuseo, 2007; Drake & Yowell, 2002). Such centers provide academic tutoring, study resources, and interactive learning opportunities to augment classroom instruction and improve students' academic skills (Arends & Woodrow, 2001). Understanding the effectiveness of academic support services and their role in supporting student retention becomes crucial in developing strategies to enhance persistence and academic achievement.

Regarding student retention, Lynch (2012) conducted a study that revealed higher retention rates among students who actively utilized academic support services compared to their unengaged peers. Personalized academic assistance and peer mentoring emerged as significant factors contributing to student persistence.

In terms of student engagement, Freeman et al. (2019) found that students who participated in academic support services exhibited higher levels of academic motivation, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging. These factors are crucial in promoting student retention, as highlighted in previous research by Kuh et al. (2005). Studies have also examined academic support services' effectiveness in specific fields. Wurtz (2016) researched STEM

fields and demonstrated that students who engaged with academic support services exhibited higher grades and reduced course withdrawals.

Shifting to the context of first-generation college students, Eveland (2019) investigated academic outcomes using survey data on academic and social support. The findings revealed lower GPAs and reduced social support for first-generation students compared to their later-generation peers within the same university. Despite similar academic support levels, first-generation students encountered challenges in translating support into academic performance.

Addressing the importance of student advising, Zhang, Gossett, Simpson, and Davis (2019) criticized existing studies for their narrow focus and quantitative methods. Their research aimed to provide a more holistic perspective by describing practical approaches and gathering narratives at various levels within the institution to enhance student success in higher education. At the conclusion of this research, they have unveiled significant insights into the multifaceted nature of student advising in higher education. Additionally, predominantly quantitative, empirical studies in student advising reveal significant variations in advising effectiveness based on factors like institution size, accreditation, and student type. Appreciative advising positively impacts academic outcomes (Hutson et al., 2014). Implementing the Deming Cycle

enhances advisement quality (Montano et al., 2005). Dawson and Watson (2007) advocate mutual respect in advising. Abernathy and Engelland (2001) find advising frequency and recency affect quality. Virtualized advising, though convenient, lacks face-to-face encouragement (Thompson & Prieto, 2013). Phillips (2013) recommends using technology like eAdvisor for improved advising.

Another researcher, Pantelich (2021), discussed the English Language Support Service (ELSS) provided to international students at a regional university in Australia. The study emphasized the service's role in facilitating students' transition to an Australian academic context, offering timely and contextualized support to boost students' confidence and engagement with their coursework.

Despite the promising outcomes of academic support services, certain barriers and challenges may impede their effectiveness. Vahid and Kadir (2016) have highlighted limited awareness and utilization of academic support services by students. Additionally, financial constraints and the need for continuous assessment and improvement of support services have been acknowledged in research by Van Rensburg and his friends (2018).

By integrating these findings into institutional practices, higher education institutions can develop comprehensive

strategies to maximize the impact of academic support sessions, advising services, and experiential learning support services. This research is particularly relevant for universities where English is a foreign language for students and courses are conducted in English—a unique context requiring specialized attention. Understanding the dynamics of universities where English is the primary language of instruction can provide valuable insights for institutions working with diverse student populations. This research can aid universities in tailoring their support services to address the distinctive needs of students whose first language differs from the language predominantly used within the university. By doing so, universities can ensure enhanced student success, retention, and academic achievement for all students, promoting inclusivity and effective learning outcomes.

Research Context

This study was conducted in an English-medium instruction public university in Turkey. The university offers undergraduate programs taught entirely in English, catering to a diverse student body with varied linguistic backgrounds, where English is not the first language for the majority of students. To ensure that students have the necessary English language proficiency to excel in their academic pursuits, the university provides a preparatory English program. This program serves as a passage for incoming students to

develop their language skills and prepare them for the demands of undergraduate coursework taught in English.

The preparatory English program is an essential component of the university's educational framework. It typically spans one academic year and aims to equip students with the language proficiency required to comprehend complex academic materials and actively engage in classroom discussions. The program follows a structured curriculum that focuses on language skills such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar. Additionally, academic vocabulary is emphasized to ensure students' smooth transition into their respective undergraduate majors. The program accommodates various levels, including advanced, upper intermediate, intermediate, elementary, and beginner levels, catering to the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the student body. It's worth noting that the attrition or dropout rate tends to be notably high, particularly in the lowest level (beginner level) A1.

Academic Support Services

The department has established a center offering academic support services to further support students' academic success. This center offers additional resources and assistance to the Beginner (A1) group students with the lowest language level, including tutoring, study materials, workshops, and language conversation practice sessions. The center aims to reinforce the

skills acquired during the preparatory English program and provide ongoing support throughout students' language learning processes.

In the 2020-2021 academic year, when the study was conducted, the academic support center implemented a range of student support services to enhance academic success and improve student retention among program students. The dedicated academic advisor conducted ten weekly online sessions, providing personalized guidance on goal-setting, time management, study strategies, and stress management. Moreover, the center organized seminars addressing test anxiety, stress management, procrastination, and time management. For writing and speaking improvement, one-on-one online sessions were offered, helping students gain confidence in expressing themselves effectively in English. Furthermore, tutoring and supplemental instruction sessions were available, catering to individual learning difficulties through appointments and drop-in support. To facilitate learning, the center designed and provided accessible support materials, including recorded lecture videos and PowerPoint presentations. These student support services were introduced to create a more inclusive learning environment and enhance student success and retention. The research aims to investigate the effectiveness of these services in promoting academic persistence among the junior student population.

Methods

To comprehensively investigate the enhancement of student engagement, our study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches. Our objective was to explore the influence of academic support services on the retention rates of junior students at a Turkish university.

Participants

The study focused on junior students enrolled in the language program of an English-medium Turkish university. Due to practical feasibility reasons, it was decided to offer interventions to a specific group or level of students within the program. In this context, a total of 430 junior students studying at the A1 (Beginner level) were eligible for participation in the study. This selection was purposeful, as the retention and achievement levels are notably lower within the beginner group. All eligible participants were granted access to academic support services, and the decision to engage in these services was left to the discretion of each individual student.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants, demographic information was gathered from university records. This information encompassed students' gender, age, and academic department. These official records of enrolled students were utilized to categorize and analyze participants based on

these demographic factors. For analysis, participants were categorized into two primary groups:

Engaged Group: This group included junior students who actively engaged with the academic support services by utilizing them for academic assistance, resources, and learning opportunities. Engagement was determined based on the utilization log provided by the academic support services. In Table 1, this category encompasses a total of 220 junior students.

Unengaged Group: The unengaged group consisted of junior students who chose not to engage with the academic support services and did not utilize the available resources beyond conventional university support. This group is represented by a total of 210 junior students in the table.

The utilization log provided detailed records of the engagement level for each participant within the engaged group. This log allowed for a precise assessment of the extent to which participants engaged with the academic support services. Importantly, participants' engagement status was determined objectively from the utilization log and not by self-report. This approach ensured accuracy and minimized potential biases associated with self-reported data.

The sample was diverse, representing various academic disciplines, genders and ages. In Table 1, we have the participant numbers categorized by gender, academic major, and age group for

both the participants and nonparticipants of the academic support services. The table provides a clear and concise overview of the distribution of participants in each group, facilitating an easy comparison between the two groups.

Table 1
Participant Demographics.

Gender	Academic Major	Age Group (years)	Engaged Group	Unengaged Group
Male	Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences	17-21	36	34
	Faculty of Engineering	18-20	40	37
	Faculty of Education	17-19	20	18
	Faculty of Arts and Sciences	19-23	24	22
Female	Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences	18-21	35	35
	Faculty of Engineering	18-20	39	35
	Faculty of Education	17-19	20	22
	Faculty of Arts and Sciences	18-19	17	18
Total	-	-	220	210

Academic Support Services as Interventions

Academic support services provided to Beginner level students include access to academic tutoring, study resources, workshops, language conversation practice sessions, and subject-specific support. The center staff designed and implemented these interventions based on student's academic needs and challenges. Table 2 shows the services offered by the center to the Beginner level students in the 2020-2021 academic year.

Table 2
The Number of Offered Sessions to Each Service.

	Number of Sessions
Writing Support	72*
Speaking Support	72*
Tutoring	72*
Supplemental Instruction & Workshops	40**
Student Advising	160***
TOTAL	**452**

* 30-minute one-to-one sessions
**Large group drop-in sessions (about one hour)
***15-minute one-to-one sessions

As Table 2 indicates, academic support services provided various services to beginner-level students, such as writing support, speaking support, tutoring, supplemental instruction, workshops, and student advising. The table displays the number of sessions for each service. For writing support, speaking support, and tutoring, a total of 72 sessions were offered, each lasting for 30 minutes and conducted one-to-one. However, for supplemental instruction and workshops, 40 sessions, which were large group drop-in sessions lasting one hour, were offered. On the other hand, 160 sessions, each lasting 15 minutes and conducted one-to-one, were offered for student advising. Overall, the Beginner level students were offered 452 sessions, which included all the academic support services provided.

Data Collection

Data was collected through quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively understand the impact of academic support services on junior students' academic journeys. Quantitative data included retention rates and academic support service utilization rates, while qualitative data were gathered through individual interviews to delve deeper into students' experiences with academic support services.

Quantitative Data Collection

To gather demographic information, university records were accessed to obtain data about students' gender, age, and academic department. This information was obtained from the official records of enrolled students and used to categorize and analyze the participants based on these demographic factors.

Retention Rates Calculation

Retention rates were assessed at the beginning of the next academic year to determine the number of students who remained enrolled (retained) and those who did not continue their studies (attrition) in both the engaged and unengaged groups. At the beginning of the following academic year, university records and official enrollment data were accessed to identify the retention status of each student in the study. The data were then organized separately for the engaged group and the unengaged group. The retention rates for each group were

calculated by dividing the number of retained students by the total number of students in that group.

Academic Support Service Usage Logs

Detailed data on participants' usage of academic support services were collected through the academic support services usage logs. These logs systematically recorded the frequency and types of services accessed by each participant throughout the academic year. The logs were electronic and included specifics such as the number of tutoring sessions attended, workshops participated in, and other support utilized.

The quantitative data collected in this study were subject to rigorous measures to ensure validity and reliability. For example, retention rates were calculated using official university records, which helped minimize the potential for measurement errors or biases. These records are considered highly reliable, as they are systematically maintained by the university's administrative systems. Additionally, the academic support service utilization logs provided detailed and objective information about the frequency and types of services accessed by each participant. These logs were kept electronically and consistently updated by the support center staff, thus enhancing the reliability of the collected data.

Qualitative Data Collection

For the qualitative data collection, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with students from the engaged group

to gain deeper insights into their experiences with the academic support sessions and their impact on their academic journey. All of the students in the engaged group who voluntarily participated in the support services were invited for individual interviews. A total of 54 students agreed to take part in the interview process, indicating a strong interest and willingness among the participants to share their perspectives and insights. However, due to logistical constraints or scheduling conflicts, we were able to interview 25 of them, allowing for in-depth discussions and a comprehensive analysis of their experiences.

One of the researchers conducted the interviews one-on-one using open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their perceptions, experiences, and suggestions related to the academic support sessions' impact on their academic journey. Some sample interview questions included "*Can you describe the types of academic support services you utilized at the center? (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing support), How did the learning centre interventions contribute to your academic progress and success throughout the academic year? In what ways did the academic support sessions support enhance your understanding of course materials and subject-specific concepts? How did you feel about attending the academic support sessions, and what were your expectations before seeking support? Can you share any specific instances where the academic support sessions' support had a positive impact on your learning experience?, How did the center's resources and assistance improve your confidence and performance in exams or assignments?, How has your experience with the academic support sessions influenced your motivation and commitment to stay enrolled in your academic program?"*

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent to ensure accurate data capture.

To ensure the robustness and credibility of the qualitative data collection process, prior to conducting the interviews, the researchers consulted with an experienced qualitative researcher and an educator in the field of higher education to refine the interview questions. These experts provided valuable insights into crafting open-ended questions that would facilitate in-depth discussions and encourage participants to share their experiences authentically. By incorporating their feedback, the researchers ensured that the interview questions were well-designed to capture participants' perspectives accurately.

To further enhance the credibility of the qualitative data, participants were allowed to review the transcripts of their interviews following the individual interviews. This process allowed them to verify the accuracy of their statements and provide additional context or clarifications if needed. Member checking not only contributed to the trustworthiness of the data but also ensured that participants' voices were accurately represented. This validation technique aligns with best practices in qualitative

research and underscores the researchers' commitment to maintaining a participant-centered approach.

Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data collected in this study, we employed a chi-square test of independence to determine whether there was a significant association between engaging with academic support services and student retention rates. This statistical test assessed if there was a meaningful relationship between the two categorical variables: service engagement (yes or no) and student retention (retained or not retained). In addition to the chi-square test of independence, we also calculated the effect size to quantify the magnitude of the relationship between engaging with academic support services and student retention rates. Specifically, we utilized Cramer's V (Cohen, 1988) as the effect size measure. Cramer's V indicates the strength of association between categorical variables, with larger values suggesting a more substantial impact of engagement on student retention.

By calculating Cramer's V, we aimed to provide a quantitative measure that complements the statistical significance tests. This effect size measurement allowed us to better understand the practical significance of the observed relationship between engagement with academic support services and student retention rates. It enables us to gauge the extent to which

engagement contributes to variations in retention outcomes beyond what might occur due to chance.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that the research adheres to ethical guidelines and protects the participants' rights and privacy. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research. Also, the necessary steps were taken to ensure participant anonymity during data analysis and reporting.

Limitations

The study acknowledged several potential limitations that warrant consideration when interpreting the results. First, the relatively small sample size and the study's confinement to a single institution setting may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. Additionally, confounding factors such as socioeconomic background, workload, personal circumstances, and more could influence student retention and are not comprehensively addressed in this study. The students self-selected to utilize services and participate in the study, which is also a limitation as it introduces a potential bias.

Furthermore, the impact of unaccounted variables that might influence the relationship between engagement and retention rates cannot be fully ruled out. Moreover, while the study categorized

students as engaged or unengaged based on service utilization, it is important to recognize that the number of sessions attended might not entirely capture the quality or depth of engagement. Despite these limitations, the study significantly contributes valuable insights into the complex relationship between academic support service engagement and student retention rates. By thoughtfully considering these limitations, researchers, educators, and policymakers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the findings' implications and context, allowing for more effective application and decision-making.

Findings

The findings of this study are based on the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected from both engaged and nonengaged groups to assess the impact of academic support services on student retention rates.

Quantitative Data

The study sample comprised 430 beginner-level junior students from diverse academic disciplines at the language program of a Turkish university. Among these students, 220 (51.2%) actively engaged with academic support services, while 210 (48.8%) chose not to engage. The engaged group consisted of students who utilized the support services for various academic assistance and resources. In contrast, the unengaged group relied exclusively on conventional university support mechanisms

encompassing physical and online library resources. These resources provided them access to course materials, supplementary documents, and sample exams, aiding their academic pursuits.

As Table 3 indicates, students demonstrated varying utilization levels in the engaged group, with a mean engagement rate of 5 sessions. While 12 students utilized the services only once, 120 students utilized services ten times. This indicated a wide spectrum of interaction with the support services, ranging from minimal utilization to more extensive engagement. The distribution of engagement levels demonstrated the heterogeneous nature of student participation.

Regarding student retention rates, the overall retention rate for the entire sample was 97.1%, indicating the percentage of students who were retained for the academic period under study. The retention rate for the engaged group was 98.1%, while the retention rate for the unengaged group was 96%.

Further exploration of demographic characteristics revealed a diverse student population. The sample encompassed students from different academic backgrounds, with representation from various disciplines such as Economics and Administrative Sciences, Engineering, Education, and Art and Sciences. Notably, all participants were Turkish nationals, reflecting the local context. The demographic variables considered for analysis encompassed age and gender.

These descriptive statistics provide an initial overview of the engaged and unengaged groups, their engagement levels, and the retention rates observed within each group. This foundational information sets the stage for the subsequent inferential analyses, where the relationship between engagement and retention rates is examined in more detail.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of Engagement Levels and Retention Rates.

Group	Engagement Rate *M*	Students with One-Time Utilization *N*	Students with Ten-Time Utilization *N*	Overall Retention %
Engaged	5 sessions	12 students	120 students	98.1%
Unengaged	-	-	-	96.0%
Total	-	-	-	97.1%

Chi-Square Test and Effect Size Calculation

A Chi-square test of independence assessed the retention rate difference between engaged and unengaged groups. The test yielded a significant difference ($\chi^2(1) = 7.60$, $p < 0.05$), signifying academic support services' impact on retention. Cramer's V as the effect size (Cramer's V = 0.52) is considered large, indicating a substantial and meaningful relationship between engagement with academic support services and enhanced retention rates (Cohen, 1988). This significant effect size corroborates the statistical significance observed in the Chi-square test and quantifies the practical relevance of academic support services in fostering improved student retention.

Table 4
Results of the Chi-square Test for Independence and Effect Size Calculation.

	χ^2	*df*	*p*	*Cramer's V*
Chi-square Test	7.60	1	.013	.52

Together, the outcomes of the Chi-square test and the effect size calculation unveil a robust and comprehensive picture of the impact of academic support services. The statistical significance and the substantial effect size accentuate the notable contribution of these services to fostering a more successful academic journey for engaged students, as evidenced by their improved retention rates compared to their unengaged counterparts.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data underwent analysis employing a coding approach inspired by Miles and Huberman's (1994) comprehensive methods for qualitative data analysis. This method facilitated a systematic and iterative procedure, allowing the identification of recurring themes and patterns in students' responses. Initially, the data were transcribed and organized, followed by assigning initial codes to meaningful text segments. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories, providing a profound exploration of students' experiences with academic support services. The process involved constant code and category comparison, leading to refined interpretations and ensuring analysis rigor and reliability.

Intercoder reliability was established by involving two independent coders who coded a subset of the data separately. The agreement between their codes was assessed using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, resulting in substantial agreement ($\kappa = 0.85$). This robust approach enhanced the credibility and consistency of the coding process, reinforcing the validity of the analysis.

Applying the established methods of Miles and Huberman, this study gleaned valuable insights into the multifaceted impact of academic support services on student success and retention within the distinct context of an English-medium instruction public university in Turkey. Table 5 provides an overview of the sample codes and themes that emerged from the data analysis process.

Table 5
Code and Theme List from the Qualitative Analysis.

Code	Theme
Academic Support	Resource Hub for Academic Support
	Academic support services
Increased Motivation	Enhanced Motivation to Stay Enrolled
	Boosted Confidence in Academic Abilities
Personalized Assistance	Tailored Individual Support
	One-to-One Tutoring
Language Practice	Improved Language Proficiency
	Language Conversation Practice Sessions
Sense of Community	Supportive Learning Community
	Workshops and Group Study Collaboration

The analysis of the theme resulted in significant insights into the impact of academic support services on students' academic

progress. Participants highlighted the crucial role of academic support services as a pivotal resource center that offers diverse academic assistance (17 participants), Participant 3 claimed, "*The support center really acted as a lifeline for me. I found a wealth of resources that helped me grasp difficult concepts*." With the incorporation of tutoring, workshops, and access to comprehensive study materials and advising sessions, students reported feeling better equipped to navigate complex language concepts and address knowledge gaps (16 participants). Participant 2 said, "*Workshops provided practical strategies that I could directly apply to my coursework. Tutoring helped me clarify doubts that I couldn't address on my own."* This multifaceted support not only enriched their academic comprehension but also fostered their determination to persevere in their educational pursuits (9 participants) as cited by Participant 10, *"Knowing I had support gave me the confidence to tackle challenges continue and not give up*."

Additionally, participants expressed sincere appreciation for the personalized academic support services tailored to their individual needs (8 participants). For example, Participant 13 stated, "*The fact that the tutoring sessions were tailored to my needs was invaluable. It felt like someone was genuinely invested in my success*." The availability of one-on-one tutoring proved especially valuable as it enabled them to address specific academic challenges with focused guidance (18 participants). Regarding that, Participant 5 added *"Having a tutor*

dedicated to my questions was a game-changer. I didn't feel lost anymore." This personalized approach, exemplified by tailored individual support and one-on-one tutoring, substantially bolstered participants' academic accomplishments and self-confidence (11 participants), as cited by Participant 1: *"I went from struggling to feeling confident in my abilities within weeks."*

The language practice sessions facilitated by the center emerged as highly beneficial for those enrolled in language-intensive programs. Participants reported that these sessions contributed to enhanced language proficiency and positively impacted their communication skills, resulting in a more comprehensive engagement with their academic pursuits (14 participants). To illustrate, Participant 20 stated, "*Language sessions not only improved my skills but also made me more comfortable participating in discussions."*

A recurring theme illuminated by the participants was the strong sense of community nurtured by the center (7 participants) as cliamed by Participant 4 *"Collaborative workshops allowed us to learn from each other. It felt like a team effort."* Collaborative workshops and group study sessions enabled students to partake in a supportive learning community where they collaboratively worked with peers, shared knowledge, and achieved success together (6 participants). Participant 3 stated *"I met the other students utilizing support services, and we sometimes*

come together… I can say that celebrated each other's victories and supported each other through challenges."

One of the most remarkable observations was the closely intertwined relationship between the center and participants' commitment to their academic journey (12 participants), as claimed by Participant 7: *"When I felt overwhelmed, knowing the center had my back kept me going."* Numerous participants attributed their persistence and continued enrollment to the center's unwavering support (9 participants). Participant 3 expressed, *"I wouldn't have made it this far without the center's guidance."* This underscores the center's pivotal role in enhancing their academic experience, fostering a supportive environment, and ultimately contributing to their tenacity and achievements.

These findings underscore the significance of academic support services in bolstering student engagement, academic triumph, and retention. The qualitative data stands as a valuable resource, offering insights into the positive influence of academic support services on students' academic trajectories.

Discussion

This study provided important insights into the impact of academic support sessions on the retention of junior students at a public university in Turkey, where English is used as the medium of instruction. The results demonstrate that academic support sessions have a significant positive effect on student retention rates,

underscoring the importance of these support services in creating a supportive learning environment for students.

The first key finding of this study is the higher retention rate observed in the engaged group, where students had access to academic support sessions. The retention rate for the engaged group was significantly higher than the unengaged group's rate. This substantial difference indicates that academic support sessions and advising play a vital role in promoting student persistence and commitment to their academic studies. The higher retention rate in the engaged group highlights the effectiveness of academic support sessions in addressing the challenges that junior students may face during their academic journey. This finding of our study aligns with Lynch's (2012) study, which found higher retention rates among students who actively utilized academic support sessions compared to unengaged peers.

The study's qualitative insights from focus group discussions and individual interviews further support the positive impact of academic support sessions. The thematic analysis has yielded noteworthy insights into the profound impact of academic support sessions on students' academic journeys. Participants consistently emphasized academic support sessions' pivotal role as a vital resource hub, offering diverse academic support services. These encompass personalized assistance such as one-

on-one tutoring sessions, language practice sessions, workshops, and access to comprehensive study materials. This comprehensive support not only enhanced participants' academic understanding but also kindled a heightened motivation to persist in their educational pursuits. The personalized assistance significantly contributed to improved academic performance and bolstered self-confidence. Additionally, academic support sessions played a central role in fostering a sense of community, where collaborative workshops and group study sessions created an environment of support and knowledge sharing. Overall, the findings underscore the transformative influence of academic support sessions in creating a holistic, supportive, and motivating academic environment for students. This finding of the study supports the findings of Freeman and his friends (2019) on the role of academic support sessions in fostering a sense of community and enhancing engagement, as the researchers demonstrated that students participating in academic support sessions had higher levels of academic motivation, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging.

This study adds valuable contributions to the existing literature on the impact of academic support sessions on student retention, particularly in the context of an English-medium instruction public university in Turkey. The findings of this study align with previous research that emphasizes the positive influence of academic support sessions on student persistence and academic success (Wurtz, 2016).

Additionally, this study uncovered a new benefit that hasn't been highlighted in previous research. While other studies have indeed shown that academic support sessions can lead to better grades and increased engagement in classes, our research goes a step further. We discovered that academic support sessions provide an essential safety net for students, helping them overcome challenges and stay committed to their education even when things get tough. This unique finding adds a fresh dimension to the existing knowledge about academic support sessions and underscores their multifaceted role in supporting students on their academic journey.

Furthermore, our study's qualitative findings bring fresh insights to the existing research by highlighting how academic support sessions play a role in making junior students feel like they belong and are more engaged in their studies. Our research has unveiled the paramount importance of establishing a nurturing community and collaborative opportunities among junior college students in their early years of higher education. It is clear that beyond offering academic guidance, these support sessions play a pivotal role in cultivating a strong sense of belonging and community spirit among these junior students. This, in turn, leads to a remarkable boost in their academic performance and motivation to excel in their studies.

In addition, in terms of the contribution to the literature, this study provides context-specific insights into the impact of academic support sessions in an English-medium instruction public university in Turkey. While previous research has explored academic support sessions' effectiveness in various educational settings, the current study addresses a specific institutional context that may have unique challenges and dynamics. The study's focus on a diverse sample of junior students from different academic disciplines adds to the robustness and applicability of the findings to similar institutions.

In brief, this study contributes to the literature by providing evidence-based insights into the positive impact of academic support sessions on student retention at an English-medium instruction public university in Turkey. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis enhances the depth and comprehensiveness of the findings, enabling a more holistic understanding of academic support sessions’ influence on student success.

The study's implications offer practical guidance for university administrators and policymakers in designing effective student support initiatives, ultimately leading to enhanced academic engagement, retention, and success among junior students. To illustrate, as affirmed by our study, the importance of tailored and personalized assistance in meeting students' specific academic

requirements remains undeniable. The one-on-one tutoring sessions and specialized subject support offered by academic support sessions emerged as crucial resources that students truly valued. These provisions significantly contribute to enhancing students' academic readiness and bolstering their self-assurance. Additionally, a salient implication from our qualitative insights revolves around the academic support sessions' unique capacity to foster a strong sense of community among students. While earlier research has acknowledged the significance of support structures, our study introduces a distinct focus on community cultivation and collaborative learning encounters in their initial year at college. This fresh perspective provides a noteworthy contribution, underlining the pivotal role of academic support sessions in not just individual academic growth but also in nurturing a collective environment where students thrive through mutual collaboration and shared learning experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, academic support sessions were offered for one academic year before its impact was measured. Future researchers aiming to delve into academic support services within higher education would benefit from investigating the enduring effects of such sessions on both student retention and academic performance. A longitudinal study spanning multiple academic years would provide a more comprehensive

understanding of the sustained effects of academic support sessions on students' persistence and success.

In addition, conducting a comparative analysis between different types of academic support sessions and support services could shed light on the most effective approaches to promoting student retention. Comparing the outcomes of academic support sessions with other academic support initiatives could help universities identify the best practices to implement.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the crucial role academic support sessions play in supporting junior students' retention at the English medium instruction public university in Turkey. The findings indicate that students who engaged in academic support sessions exhibited significantly higher retention rates compared to their peers without such support. The positive impact of academic support sessions on students' academic journey is evident through both quantitative and qualitative data.

The higher retention rates observed in the engaged group emphasize the importance of investing in academic support sessions as effective support structures for junior students. By providing academic tutoring, advising, workshops, and subject-specific resources, academic support sessions contribute to students' academic preparedness and enhance their ability to navigate the challenges of higher education.

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that the university further strengthen and expand its academic support sessions. Implementing targeted interventions and personalized support can effectively address students' diverse academic needs and promote their engagement with their studies. Additionally, continuous assessment and improvement of academic support sessions are essential to ensure their ongoing effectiveness.

The study's insights provide valuable evidence-based strategies to optimize support structures, promote student retention, and ultimately enhance the overall academic experience for junior students at the university. Academic support sessions are pivotal in fostering a conducive learning environment and facilitating students' academic success in an English-medium instruction context. The study's findings contribute to the broader understanding of effective student support initiatives and highlight the significance of academic support sessions in higher education settings.

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