

TUTOR TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

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University administrators (and the parents of undergraduates) have a growing expectation that students providing consulting services in a communication center receive the training that the profession deems appropriate for their important role. Certification also provides these students with a credential that might enhance their job or graduate school opportunities.

Note that certification is **not** a requirement. Rather, the certification procedure is available to those communication centers that find the option valuable. Because NCA units such as ours cannot put the “NCA” name on a credential such as certification without consideration and approval at higher levels, the certification comes from NACC, with the endorsement of the NCA Communication Centers section.

I. Selection of tutors

Tutors in a certified program should be hired only after (a) soliciting appropriate faculty endorsements and (b) an interview. Successful completion of a communication course or documented equivalent experience should also be required. Directors may find that additional requirements, such as a recorded speech, a mock presentation to a specified audience, or a writing sample, may also be useful. The term “hiring” should not be interpreted to imply that tutoring must be salaried.

Tutors should meet several key criteria. They should demonstrate that they understand the key theoretical concepts as they inform effective oral presentations in the contexts appropriate to the Center, as well as being able to put those concepts to good effect. In addition, they should be smart, articulate, motivated, sensitive, enthusiastic, and ethical.

II. Training of tutors

A. Time On-Task

Proper training requires a substantial commitment of time. A significant number of hours should be spent in training, followed by a significant number of hours of supervised tutoring.

“Supervised” does not imply that the tutor will be observed for the entire time; nor does “supervised” imply that all supervision must be by the center’s director or faculty staff member. This supervision should include shadowing experienced tutors as well as having experienced tutors shadow trainees. In new centers, such shadowing could be collaborative sessions with the director [although this may not qualify for certification].

B. Modes of training

Training can be provided through a number of modes. These can, of course, be appropriately mixed. The modes would include a credit-bearing course, workshop/s, role-playing, discussion of various scenarios, periodic meetings, one-on-one conferences, on-line instruction, videotapes, and assigned readings. The expectation is that a given center's mode of training will reflect its particular institutional setting. A medium-sized comprehensive university with a large percentage of commuting students will undoubtedly feature a different training procedure than a small liberal arts college with mostly residential students.

C. Topics

1. *Overview*

- The role of communication in public life
- Mission and needs of the institution → how the center meets those needs

2. *Tutoring Expertise*

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

3. *Communication Instructional Expertise*

- The ability to analyze an assignment (including rhetorical analysis)
- The ability to help a student identify an appropriate topic
- The ability to help a student generating and researching material
- An understanding of and the ability to help a student use the resources of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*
- The ability to help a student organize material effectively, and to understand the implications of various organizational patterns
- The ability to help a student develop effective introduction, transitions, and conclusions.
- An understanding of what constitutes effective verbal and non-verbal delivery and the ability to help a student identify and address delivery problems
- The ability to help a student use audio-visual resources effectively
- Diagnostic abilities
- An understanding of and the ability to help a student address communication apprehension
- The ability to help a student handle Q & A (after presentation, in studio, or at poster session)
- An understanding of the differences between individual and group presentations
- If appropriate to a Center's mission, an understanding of small group

- dynamics—in particular, the communication behaviors characteristic of productive and unproductive groups
- If appropriate to a Center’s mission, an understanding of interviewing, debating, and other special or discipline-specific communication situations
- If appropriate to a Center’s student population, an understanding of ESL students’ Cultural and Language Difficulties and the ability to work effectively with these students to overcome them

4. Administrative Expertise

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

III. Continuing evaluation of tutors

Tutors should be informally and formally evaluated based on observations and on assessments of tutoring services offered by recipients and/or relevant faculty. The results of these evaluations should be made known to tutors.

Centers can establish levels of expertise for tutors, whereby the completion of a number of years of service, levels of training, and achievement of expertise result in more advanced levels.

In addition, annual reports should be shared with the tutors, so they have a greater understanding of their contributions to the overall enterprise.

IV. Procedures

Note that NACC does **not** certify tutors individually. Rather, NACC certifies the tutor training *programs* of individual communication centers. Applications should therefore describe the training program by clearly delineating how the training requirements identified above are met.

The application should be submitted electronically to the current chair of NCA’s Communication Centers section, who also functions as the leader of NACC. The chair will share the application with the other officers, who will respond using the attached evaluation form. Applications are accepted year round and responses to applications can be expected within six weeks. Those responses may be acceptance and certification, a request for further information, or denial.

Once a center’s training program is certified, the director should request that NACC issue certificates to students who complete the approved program (i.e., “John Doe has successfully completed a communication tutor training program certified by the NACC”).