

Appendix A

**The Evaluation of Communication
Center Directors**

Procedures and Criteria

*Approved by the Communication Centers Section of the
National Communication Association, November 2007*

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I. EVALUATION PROCEDURES

The evaluation of communication center directors will yield a variety of benefits. The process can help directors themselves identify areas of strength as well as avenues for potential improvement. This identification will in turn benefit the staff as well as the students, faculty, and others served by the communication center. The process can help administrators appreciate the value of communication centers to the institution, and communication centers across the country can learn from sharing the results of such evaluations. Demonstration of the high standards and valuable work of communication centers will be to everyone's gain. Evaluation is, therefore, a process both communication center directors and the administrators to whom they report should endorse.

The evaluation criteria outlined below are intended as guidelines for the periodic, perhaps annual, assessment of communication center directors. In addition, as with any academic program, communication center directors should participate in a more substantial evaluation involving external reviewers at appropriate longer intervals. For these evaluations to be accurate and, therefore yield the benefits noted above, the evaluations should be conducted,

wholly or in part, by someone conversant in the theory and practice of communication, particularly as it pertains to communication centers.¹

For the more substantial reviews, evaluation by a team offers an institution the advantage of multiple perspectives. If the institution chooses a team, representatives from communication are essential so that the perspective of the discipline most directly relevant to the communication center fully informs the team's assessments. An institution should consider using an outside evaluator, for such an evaluator provides an even-handed perspective and enhances the validity of reviews. The National Communication Association (NCA) maintains a list of faculty who are expert external reviewers. Those who direct NCA's Communication Center Section and the National Association of Communication Centers can also recommend reviewers with specific knowledge of communication center issues.

A campus visit by the external evaluator is advisable. Meeting with the director, administrators, faculty, and both professional and student staff enriches a reviewer's understanding of a communication center's operation, as does a firsthand investigation of the physical facilities. Evidence of the criteria below should be compiled into a dossier and provided to the reviewer(s) at least a month in advance of that visit for the assessment to accrue its full benefits. All stakeholders should agree in advance on guidelines for the external evaluator to follow, and these should be clearly communicated to him/her.

II. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Depending on the institution, the director of the communication center may also teach classes, serve on committees, and advise students. As the means of evaluating these activities are well established, this document will focus specifically on the assessment of the responsibilities particularly pertaining to direction of the communication center. One would envision the job of communication center director to necessarily be a sizeable portion of a person's position. Its evaluation should, of course, be weighted based on the size of that portion; the size will vary among institutional contexts.

We need to emphasize that, because the role of the director includes significant amounts of instructional and intellectual work, the directorship should be "a professional position," defined as a faculty and/or administrative position rather than that of staff; and it should ideally be a tenurable position.² Therefore the criteria below are based on the assumption that the expectations of the director are and should be comparable to those for other tenurable faculty/administrators. The criteria, however, also reflect the understanding that the directorship is neither a simple instructional nor a simple administrative

position but, rather, one that blends the two in distinctive ways. The criteria furthermore take into consideration the fact that the directorship is not just a two-dimensional job, but rather a position in which the incumbent is expected to produce intellectual work that then informs and improves the communication center and, likely, communication centers more broadly. Therefore, rather than evaluate the director's job as director in terms of teaching, professional activity, and service, we recommend evaluating the director based on fulfillment of the job description as well as the high quality of intellectual work. This two-part evaluation reflects that teaching, professional activity, and service merge in distinctive ways in the work of the communication center director.

The starting point for evaluation is the job description for the communication center director, providing the director, administrators to whom s/he reports, and the reviewers with a common understanding. If there are differences in the understanding of those responsibilities, they should be addressed at the outset of the review.

In addition, the evaluation should consider the institutional context. What functions does the center serve? How do these functions serve the mission of the institution? Just as institutions vary, so do the jobs of communication center directors. The following responsibilities, refined to fit institutional characteristics, are appropriate ones:

- to provide and preserve a sense of direction for the communication center
- to shape the curriculum of the communication center
- to teach in the communication center's programs
- to prepare and/or purchase materials needed in the communication center
- to acquire and maintain the physical facilities of the communication center, including space, equipment, and technology
- to consult with communication center staff and with faculty on oral communication instruction
- to recruit and select tutors
- to continually train tutors
- to supervise tutors
- to mentor tutors
- to evaluate tutors regularly
- to offer tutoring, particularly in difficult situations
- to maintain effective working relationships within the communication center (including those with tutors, clients, and faculty), and with key constituencies outside the communication center (e.g., faculty, administration, admissions, and advisors)
- to maximize the educational experience of those using the communication center

- to keep careful records that are made available as required to students, teachers, tutors, and administrators
- to administer budget allocations responsibly
- to ensure continuous funding of the communication center
- to ensure that appropriate constituencies know of the services and opportunities provided by the communication center, through publicity and other means
- to maintain communication with the institution's other communication programs
- to work with faculty in such programs as communication across the curriculum and communication in the disciplines
- to conduct outreach activities involving constituencies beyond the academy
- to continue professional growth through appropriate reading, courses, studies, research, and participation in professional organizations and workshops
- to organize all activities of the communication center
- to provide for regular reports on the activities, progress, and problems of the communication center
- to provide for regular and thorough evaluation of the communication center and its programs³

These responsibilities suggest a position that mixes management and teaching in significantly collaborative ways. Sometimes, a task clearly belongs in one category or the other; but often the two overlap, as in the supervision and mentoring of tutors or in the consultation with colleagues concerning instructional issues in communication courses or communication across the curriculum efforts. It is important that evaluators within and outside of the institution recognize that, often, management and teaching functions cannot be separated for a communication center director.

The director, however, informs his or her performance of the management and teaching responsibilities with considerable intellectual work. Evaluation of the director of the communication center should include an assessment of this important contribution.⁴ Intellectual work may include efforts in five areas: program creation, curricular design, faculty development, program assessment and evaluation, and program-related textual production (in a variety of media). A director's intellectual work is not limited to these five areas, nor need it occur in all of these areas. Emphases will vary from institution to institution and from time to time. The director and those conducting the evaluation, however, should have a shared, clear sense of where the director's intellectual work should focus.

Efforts in these five constitute genuine intellectual work when:

- it generates, clarifies, connects, reinterprets, or applies knowledge based on research, theory, and sound pedagogical practice
- it requires disciplinary knowledge available only to an expert educated in or conversant with a particular field
- it requires highly developed analytical or problem-solving skills derived from specific expertise, education, or research derived from scholarly knowledge
- it results in products or activities that can be evaluated by peers (e.g., publication, internal and external evaluation, participant responses) as the contribution of the individual's insight, research, and disciplinary knowledge⁵

Criteria for assessing the quality of intellectual work include the following:

- **Innovation:** The communication center director creates one or more programs, curricular emphases, assessment measures, etc.
- **Improvement/refinement:** The director makes changes and alterations that distinctly and concretely lead to better tutoring, improved teaching, sounder classroom practices, etc.
- **Dissemination:** Through workshops, colloquia, staff meetings, outreach programs, and other fora, the director is able to communicate curricular goals, methodologies, and overall programmatic philosophy in such a way as to lead to positive and productive results for students, tutors, faculty, and the institution.
- **Empirical results:** The director is able to present concrete evidence of accomplishments; that evidence may take the form of pre- and post-evaluative measures; written testimonials from students, staff, and faculty; teaching evaluations; etc.⁶

These criteria are premised on the assumption that the position of communication center director should be evaluated from two different but somewhat overlapping perspectives: First, is the managing/teaching job being done well? Second, is the director enhancing the center (and, perhaps, centers regionally or nationally) as well as the institutional community by engaging in intellectual work of a high quality?

Although one would hope that a communication center director who is not in a tenurable position would meet these criteria, such a person would probably not be expected to have done high quality intellectual work at the same level as a director who is in a tenurable position. For example, the director who is not in a tenurable position might do such work in fewer areas than the

director who is in a tenurable position or might not be expected to disseminate his or her work as widely. Similarly, should a center have an assistant director, the job description could be derived from the above criteria, and this person should engage in intellectual work at an appropriately adjusted level.

These criteria have been adapted from those developed for writing centers and writing programs. These centers and programs typically pre-date communication centers. Thus, their directors have had the opportunity to consider the issues surrounding the direction of a center and then craft criteria that reflect both what directors do and what excellent directors should do. We are delighted to follow our writing colleagues' lead, and we suggest that using similar standards for writing center and communication center directors reflects an important common understanding of how such centers and their directors function within an academic institution.

NOTES

1. As the position statement of the International Writing Centers Association asserts, reviews should "be conducted by persons in the same area of specialization." See Jeanne H. Simpson, "What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers: Position Statement on Professional Concern," *Writing Center Journal* 5.2/6.1 (1985): 35-39.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., adapted for Communication Centers.

4. See "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration," <http://www.nacouncil.org/positions/intellectualwork.html> (1998), which incorporates work by Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990); Diamond and Adam, *The Disciplines Speak* (1995); and MLA Commission on Professional Service, "Making Faculty Work Visible: Reinterpreting Professional Service, Teaching, and Research in the Fields of Language and Literature" (1996).

5. Ibid., adapted for Communication Centers.

6. Ibid., adapted for Communication Centers.