Ethics, technology, and standard practice in communication centers: Proposing a continuing education credit program based on lessons learned from law, business, and healthcare

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Communication centers on university campuses can benefit from the experience of other disciplines with established norms and educational practices. This article examines the legal profession, the business profession, and healthcare with the intent to locate meaningful overlap that can be practically applied to communication centers. While different, each of the three fields promotes shared decision-making, ongoing training specific to ethical practice, and promotes technical adaptation. Examining service and training in these three professional fields led the authors to identify a framework for communication centers that focuses on the following areas: standard practice and education, ethics, and technology. It is important to note that while different disciplines contain their own respective forms of standards and communicative norms, it does not necessarily mean they should merge into a completely new form. Rather, it is important to understand the point of departure from one and the point of arrival for another so disciplines can interact and benefit from one another (Heemskerk, Wilson, & Pavao-Zuckerman, 2003).

There are 150 communication centers in the United States and Canada, as of 2021 (National Association of Communication Centers, 2021). With the goal of enhancing students' education, centers offer experiential learning and instructional experience (Benedict, Shields, Wieland, Hall 2020; Brann-Barrett & Rolls, 2004). Some centers combine oral communication and written communication services while others specialize in one. Communication centers tend to focus on their student population, though some work within their larger local learning community to help people improve their public speaking or address other concerns relating to communication (Schwartzman et al., 2020). Because university needs and community needs are constantly evolving, communication center staff and their directors should strive to identify ways to improve and grow (The Evaluation of Communication Center Directors, 2008). One way to improve the organizational structure of a center or centers is to make creative connections between them and other fields. With this in mind, we pose the following research question:

RQ: What lessons can communication centers learn from the legal profession, business, and healthcare?

The authors choose to highlight these three fields because each is predicated on service and relationships, which are foundational elements of communication centers. Simply stated, lawyers serve their clients, those in business serve their customers, and clinicians serve their patients. Communication centers are established spaces of service, and those who work there do so because they want to help others. Examining other fields in the context of communication centers can benefit center staff as well as those who do research in this area.

The Legal Profession

The legal profession is one with a rich history spanning centuries. This richness is reflected in the numerous requirements of the profession, the rigorous ongoing training, and the vast array of skills, such as communication skills, used by practitioners. These practices, training, and skills can be adapted to a communication center as there is already an existing overlap, albeit not instantly recognizable, between this field and communication centers.

Standard Practice & Education

In terms of practice, there are many activities and requirements demanded of attorneys to stay current and maintain their ability to practice law. This includes the general requirements to become licensed, the peer review process, the importance of mentoring, and the requirement of pro bono or volunteer hours to maintain a license. The number of lawyers entering the discipline continues to grow despite the credentialing hurdles imposed by states and their bar associations (Ziv, 2012). To obtain a law license in the state of Florida, for example, one must attend a law school accredited by the American Bar Association and pass a series of complicated exams known collectively as the "bar exam" (Consumer Pamphlet, 2021). Although it may not be possible for a tutor in a communication center to attend an accredited program, one lesson derived from the legal profession is to require potential tutors to sit for an exam prior to employment. This exam, similar to a bar exam, should ask a potential tutor to explain certain concepts and apply them to real-life scenarios. For example, a tutor could explain the idea of an attention getter in the introduction portion of a presentation and then describe how they would work with a client to better understand the concept. This will also allow center staff to remain consistent in its skill and knowledge levels.

In addition to the previously mentioned requirements mandated for an individual to become licensed to practice law, attorneys must pass a character test in the form of a peer review. This peer review comes from individuals who know the attorney. The review asks for comments regarding professionalism and assesses the individual's ethics (Tanner, 2010). A communication center might consider implementing its own version of peer review by perhaps having established tutors observe a new tutor, which could improve their professionalism. In addition, conducting self-reflection may help a tutor become stronger (DiPippa & Peters, 2003). Since counseling clients is a large part of both the legal field and communication center practice, a center will benefit from continued development of these skills among its tutors.

Another practice used by the legal discipline to help train employees is mentoring. Explained by Lewinbuk (2019), mentoring in "the legal

community can guide, mold, and aid those entering the legal field" (p. 212). Similarly, in a center, new tutors can partner with a senior tutor and learn how to properly work with clients. This can also include shadowing existing tutors. Attorneys assigned a mentor typically obtain more success than those without a mentor (Lewinbuk, 2019). As lawyers are more successful with the assignment of a mentor, a communication center tutor may also be more successful with the aid of a mentor. Vance (2019) identifies the following suggestions for mentors in the legal profession: allow mentoring relationships to develop naturally rather than being assigned; consider diversity and work toward being more inclusive; schedule time for questions and to speak about the mentee's concerns; encourage the mentors to genuinely care about helping their mentees. All these suggestions can certainly be applied to mentors within a communication center, which may result in stronger relationships between veteran tutors and new hires.

Because pairing a mentor with a mentee is a deliberate act, the center's director (or whomever is responsible for overseeing the pairings) should consider framing the experience as a process that requires participants to reflect on their expectations of the relationship and communicate those expectations to the other participant (Clements, 2014). As an experience, mentoring becomes more meaningful when both the mentor and the mentee share their goals (e.g., *"this is what I hope to learn from you"* or *"to me, a good mentor-mentee relationship looks like…"*). It is crucial that both participants understand they are actively constructing the rules, roles, and expectations of their interactions (Clements, 2014, p. 44). It is not an "information dump" from the mentor onto the mentee. Reinforcing an experiential frame with open communication will help empower the mentee as well as help the mentor understand how the responsibility is shared between participants.

Another key practice in the legal discipline is the requirement of pro bono work, which means "for the public good" and those work hours "undertaken without charge" (Abourezk, 2021). Attorneys are required to provide their services for free or in a voluntary manner. This requirement is instilled in lawyers from the beginning of their careers. Law schools require students to participate in some form of voluntary or even mandatory volunteer work (Faith-Slaker, 2016). Encouraging communication center staff to perform their services with a population in need of assistance may create a unique opportunity to attract new clients, recruit students to the university, or increase the visibility of the center in the local community.

Communication centers could partner with high schools in the area and offer workshops for students on topics like interviewing or general presentation skills. A communication center may seek to grow beyond the corners of the university and develop connections or partnerships with local community organizations (Schartzman et al., 2020). Community engagement is strongly encouraged by many universities and a communication center might miss the opportunity to play a strong role in building community relationships. Pro bono work is a way to demonstrate a center's value in achieving its goals of helping others.

Volunteer work benefits the recipients and can positively impact the

volunteer directly. Wilson and Musick (1999) argue individuals who engage in volunteer work are healthier, happier, and have higher self-esteem. If a communication center wants to help its staff feel better, perhaps a volunteer hour requirement or simply encouraging tutors to volunteer is worth exploring.

Ethics

Ethical communication is a foundational practice within the legal discipline. Attorneys serve as problem solvers for their clients, and they must do so using a confidential approach. To practice the law effectively, one must strive to maintain privacy, courtesy, and respect (Tanner, 2010). This parallels a tutor in a communication center who works with a client and may provide them with guidance related to personal or emotional problems. Many speeches, after all, weave personal elements into them. Or, clients might connect with tutors and feel compelled to share personal details about their lives, like regretting taking a class requiring oral presentations or feeling overwhelmed by their assignments. Lawyers are taught to consider a problem carefully and explore the ethical ramifications before deciding upon a solution (Ampil, 2009). By taking time and applying active listening, a speech tutor may be able to avoid prescribing a solution to a student, but rather work with the student to understand their needs.

Communication centers should develop their own policies regarding ethics and confidentiality. Some students visiting a center may experience anxiety related to public speaking or even in seeking out help in general. These are sensitive matters and may require assurance for the student to feel comfortable expressing their anxiety. Law schools often include a clinical requirement where students gain experience working with real clients in addition to skills training courses to develop their own ethical communication style (Spencer, 2012). Communication centers should consider mirroring some of these programs.

Technology

New advances in science and technology require constant updates to the laws. While some continuing education programs and continuing legal education credits ("CLEs") focus on new laws, others include topics such as diversity, inclusion, and ethics (The American Bar Association Model Rules, 2021). In 2017, Florida began requiring attorneys to also attend a CLE on technology to maintain an active license in the state (The Florida Bar Association Annual Report, 2017). This technology requirement ensures attorneys stay current regarding changes in the field. Other states in addition to Florida also require some form of CLE to maintain a law license and authorization to practice within the state (Bowman, 2005).

Inspired by CLEs, a communication center could require training or educational workshops covering a range of topics, some of which could be related to technology, where attendees are taught how to conduct online tutoring sessions. Other areas of interest for continuing education credits could focus on diversity and inclusion. In fact, scholars argue communication centers need to develop new ways to connect with students with disabilities as this population continues to increase (Schwartzman & Ferraro, 2020). Online tutoring can provide an advantage to communication centers, as Nejezchleb

(2020) argues. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and institutions switching to remote learning, the idea of incorporating video conferencing or telephone sessions may become more mainstream.

Lawyers and communication center tutors have many commonalities. From problem solving with clients, to giving back to the community, centers can benefit from incorporating training and skill development inspired by the legal profession, especially when considering the potential benefits of continuing education programs. Communication centers can learn from this rich discipline and are encouraged to explore continuing education programming for their tutors.

The Business Profession

The top degrees pursued by undergraduates over the past decade include business management and administration, general business, and accounting, comprising nearly 17 percent of degrees earned (Carnevale, Strohl, & Melton, 2013). While the courses within their degree programs prepare students for many of the tasks they will inevitably encounter in their prospective fields, there is still a gap between what is taught in the classroom and what students are prepared for when entering the workforce (Francis, 2012; Louhiala-Salminen, 1996). Because of this gap, communication centers can work to build supplemental programs to better prepare students as they begin to seek employment in their desired fields. Communication centers can benefit from skills that are more traditionally aligned with the private sector.

Standard Practice and Education

Business communication is complex because the organizational structures are matrixed (Satell, 2015) and additional training is often required because the training is specific to one's job, a process called onboarding. One area that presents a learning opportunity is general communication within the workplace, where training is developed to demonstrate how to communicate within one's department (e.g., preferred communication channels, organizational hierarchy, departmental jargon) and how to engage colleagues, clients, or internal or external partners.
Individuals undergoing the onboarding process experience an acculturation process where they must learn about their new corporate culture. Acculturation, or the cultural and psychological growth and change that takes place as the individual experiences consistent contact with a new host culture and its individual members, can be a challenging process for new hires (Berry, 2005). Acculturation includes learning about the corporate macro-culture, the smaller (and less formal) microcultures, and the technologies that are integral to an individual's success in their new role.

Organizational culture is inherently layered, where much of the culture itself is driven by intra-organizational norms and values that include behavioral patterns, shared meaning, and collective processes as well as how/why individuals within organizations comply with norms and values (Kondra & Hurst, 2009). Given how layered organizational cultures are, communication centers can provide foundational-level insight into how corporate culture works and how to thrive in it. This can include finding a mentor, participating in industry-

specific networking events, and actively reading corporate communication messages (e.g., university or center related social media posts, global e-mails, organizational flyers and newsletters).

Networking and corporate communication are also common integral aspects of the business professions and are areas communication centers can incorporate to grant students access to professional opportunities. Professional networking, or the developing and maintaining of "relationships that have the potential to assist [individuals] in their work or career," can serve as both an activity and a skill that will invariably connect an individual to the next milestone in their career (Forret & Dougherty, 2004, p. 420). Networking provides individuals with the opportunity to connect with others outside of their day-to-day tasks. Examples of forms of networking include corporate resource groups, professional/industry events, mentoring, and events specifically focused on networking and connecting individuals.

A center staff member can assume the role of "networking organizer." This person would compile and update a list of local businesses, industry leaders, and other university contacts or partner with another organization on campus who provides this type of information, which could then be categorized by their unique attributes. This would allow students and staff to find the appropriate event for them. In addition, communication centers can provide students with an action list of items to maximize their time at a networking event. Examples of what this can include are how to properly communicate nonverbally, popular questions to ask during conversation, and what events they should attend (e.g., keynote presentation). Because corporate communication works to minimize organizational fragmentation, centers can use this ideology to connect with career services, clubs on campus, or even with other communication centers. This corporate model of communication reduces the possibility of siloing that can occur over time.

Interpersonal relationships are tied to the psychological need to belong to an in-group (Reich & Hershcovis, 2011). A systems theory approach provides insight into how one connects (or fails to connect) with others. Ludwig von Bertalanffy explains how an individual within an organization is not "'a reactive automaton or robot, but [contains] an active personality system', meaning, among other things, an open, information-processing, dynamically self-regulating system" (Rogers, 1991, p. 37). Communication centers might consider hosting educational workshops for their staff, exposing them to interpersonal and organizational theories such as systems theory to help boost staff's understanding of how another individual might react to different stimuli, such as positive or negative praise (Conners & Brammer, 2018).

With corporate hierarchy, aspects of power distance inevitably emerge, creating a superior-subordinate dynamic (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede, 2011; Zhang & Begley, 2011). This can include situations involving power distance (e.g., manager-to-employee conversations), conflict with a coworker, or the sharing of information with a different department. For communication centers, this creates an opportunity to equip its staff with tools needed to navigate conversations that have an inherent power structure. In addition, communication centers can

train students preparing to graduate on ways to "manage their managers" (Gabarro & Kotter, 2008). Corporate organizations encourage cross-sectional interactions that connect employees who would otherwise never interact with one another (Gronstedt, 1996). Corporate communication, or "the process that collects information from the business environment, develops messages from the information, and sends them to get specific economic results," has a high return on investment (Horton, 1995, p. 21) and is a successful tool in overcoming organizational fragmentation (Cornelissen, 2008).

Corporate communication methodologies connect employees across matrixed organizations, whereby favorable partnerships often emerge between groups that the organizations rely on for overall success (Oltarzhevskyi, 2019). Communication centers can benefit from a corporate communication model, using the center's space as a place to connect students, faculty, and center staff in a unique setting apart from the traditional classroom.

Ethics

Businesses have an obligation to provide new hires with the tools needed to be successful in their roles. Research shows a substantial relationship between effectively training employees and increased levels of productivity (Dearden, Reed, & Van Reenen, 2000). Many companies have shifted away from a traditional view of employees being valuable "from the neck up," instead creating a more progressive approach that is inclusive and acknowledges the entirety of the individual (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001). In many corporate training environments, new hires learn the nuances of their roles in a safe space, which communication centers can emulate. During these training sessions, staff can practice in simulations before going live (i.e., leaving the training environment) (El-Tannir, 2002).

Because employee engagement is paramount to establishing overall corporate excellence (Anand, 2017), there is an ethical obligation to acknowledge individuals as a whole person whose body, emotions, mind, and spirit are interconnected. Not addressing this interconnectedness can compromise performance (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001). Communication centers can implement these industry practices to support students through the adoption of a holistic approach if they are not doing so already. For example, this can include workshops, simulations, and soft skills training to demonstrate how awareness of one's body, emotions, mind, and spirit can yield increased productivity.

Many companies have begun to include networking as part of their code of ethics to ensure success for their employees, as these types of connections benefit the employee and the organization (Hegstad & Wentling, 2005). Often, networking events can have a particular focus for a specific demographic (e.g., Hispanic, African American, women, LGBTQ+) and are facilitated by leaders who have a vested interest in seeing their colleagues succeed (Singh, Vinnicombe, & Kumra, 2006). Providing the infrastructure for connection among employees within similar demographics can foster relationships with others who understand one another's unique sets of challenges that a direct manager may not understand. These networks can play a crucial role in one's career growth because they provide exposure to new faces, build support systems

with other like-minded individuals, and create new contacts or employment opportunities (Raj, Fast, & Fisher, 2017). Communication centers function as a network, with the center itself functioning as the nexus where faculty, students (tutors and clients), and professionals in the larger community can interact and form new relationships.

Technology

When new hires are brought into an organization, one of the most challenging aspects of the onboarding and acculturation process is learning about new technologies. The types of technologies one may be exposed to can vary, as each organization differs with its investment in technology as well as its overall corporate governance of information technology (Wilkin et al., 2016). What this means for the individual is there may be a wave of new software platforms to learn, many of which may be homegrown by the company's development team. The technologies used within an organization can vary across departments, and there are some that all associates may need to use (e.g., timesheets, payroll history, company intranet) and others may be unique to one's role (e.g., access to data platforms, customer information, finance). Becoming proficient in these programs can be a critical component in an employee's success.

Organizations often develop internal learning teams that are composed of subject matter experts who can build relationships with new hires. Learning teams operate with the end goal of effectively disseminating knowledge regarding these software platforms and help new hires thrive in their roles. Where communication centers can improve here is twofold: by understanding the differences between a corporate training classroom and a higher education classroom and by recognizing how these corporate training classrooms prepare their new hires for success. The skills learned in corporate training classrooms are measurable and actionable, which is an aspect that can be adopted by communication centers so the organization may actively gauge the future successes of the students who visit them.

The Healthcare Profession

Healthcare is one of the most complicated and expansive fields in the United States. Though it is imperfect, there are lessons communication centers can learn from the medical field and practices centers might consider adopting. Hospitals/clinics and communication centers are not organizations we tend to associate. However, each is a place of service functioning for the good of those who visit it. Each is partially dependent on team-based communication, and each is ever-evolving (or at least they should be). This section discusses some of the most relevant practices in healthcare in hopes of highlighting useful parallels from which communication centers can benefit.

Standard Practice & Education

While medicine has always focused on the patient, today's healthcare system is more personalized and comprehensive than it has been in previous eras. Modern healthcare prioritizes "patient-centered care" (PCC), which means it is focused on the specifications of each patient and tailors care plans to meet individualized needs and desired outcomes (Kuipers, Cramm & Nieboer, 2019). Conceptually, keeping patients at the center of their

care seems natural, but it can be complicated when placed in context, like an instance when a patient's preferences or behaviors do not align with overall care goals set by or with doctors and nurses. For example, if a cancer patient wants to stop a certain treatment the care team believes is working, friction might occur. If the treatment is "working" but not working *for this specific patient*, the focus must shift to discuss issues related to quality-of-life so clinicians can better understand the context in which they are treating the patient whose wants and needs may have changed (Charles, Gafni & Whelan, 1999).

The concept of patient-centered care as standard practice is useful to those who work in communication centers because of the wide range of needs and varying skill levels students bring into a center. Even if a center is already tailoring its practices using approaches inspired by existing research (see Benedict et al., 2020; Cuny, Wilde, Stevens, 2021; Fabian, 2019; Smithberger, 2016), patient-centered care (PCC) is a term and practice that can be translated into language that is reflective of a communication center, thus patient-centered care becomes "client-centered tutoring" or CCT. Client-centered tutoring gives terminology to a core value. It also serves as a checks and balances of sorts, where center staff who adopt CCT will have a reason to pause and ask, *"is this session reflecting client-centered tutoring? If not, how can I redirect it so that it does?"*

If client-centered tutoring aligns with a center's pedagogy, it is useful to consider adopting the term "CCT" and promoting it across the staff in hopes of maintaining a standard of "centering in the center." Of course, just like in healthcare, keeping clients at the center of everyday practice can be more difficult than it seems. For example, clients who seek last-minute assistance on an assignment can frustrate the balance between providing rich feedback and doing what is practical (Benedict et al., 2020). Another example is when clients suggest or blatantly ask a tutor to do the work/assignment *for them*. When this happens, the client's wants do not align with the goals of the center or its staff. However, this type of exchange should not dissuade one from a CCT approach. Similar to a healthcare professional interacting with an unsatisfied patient, the brooding student could be conceptualized as a challenge worthy of applying one's CCT "centering skills." A tutor could redirect the exchange toward a question-based interaction or shift to fulfill the role of empathic listener (Fabian, 2019) to help maintain focus on the client's needs (rather than desires) without compromising the tutor's values or their pedagogical intentions. If/when students ask a tutor to do an assignment *for them*, the tutor could respond using the following phrasing and still maintain the integrity of the CCT approach: *"It seems you are a tad hesitant to orally cite your sources during your speech. Remember, you are at the center for tutoring. I hear your request to have me find you better sources. Rather than have me search for credible sources while you sit next to me, I feel that giving you 10-15 minutes alone to log onto our library's website to search for key terms that fit your speech topic would be a good use of time. After 10 minutes pass, I will come check on your progress. How does that sound? Do you feel like that would be useful?"* Ironically, the concept of "centered care" may be more useful during times when a client-tutor interaction is tense or taxing than during moments when

the client's wants and needs align with the tutor's.

Though the power dynamics of the doctor-patient relationship are more extreme than the relational dyad of client-tutor, there is a possibility for an imbalance of power to occur. Preferably, power is shared between the tutor and the client as well as among all members of the tutoring staff (Moss, 2019). Examining one's style of communication can assist in the effort to maintain an equitable exchange. During a staff meeting, for example, questioning when horizontal communication and vertical communication are not only used but desired might spark self-reflection. Research in healthcare found nurses who practiced horizontal communication contributed to a reduction of medical errors (Jinhuyn & Jung, 2016). In fact, many medical errors are either caused or prevented by a team or an individual's communication style (Khatri, Baveja, Boren & Mammo, 2006). Given the role a tutor assumes, a tutor could have the intention to communicate horizontally but enact vertical communication inadvertently. Therefore, reflecting on the flow of one's communication and the ethics of the client-tutor relationship are useful practices.

Ethics

The doctor-patient dyad is the central and perhaps most important relationship in healthcare (Kuper, 2007). While there are multiple key players in a healthcare team, patients often prefer interacting with their physician when making decisions related to their care. Because patients (and the medical industrial complex as a whole) position doctors in an authoritative role, it is the doctor's responsibility to be mindful of the ways in which their position can influence the dynamics of the relationship, thus highlighting the importance of ethics in everyday practice. Those who work in communication centers will interact with students who are intimidated by the tutoring process or apprehensive toward public speaking (see Dwyer, Carlson, & Hahre, 2002). For some, the simple act of entering the physical space or signing on to a virtual session/workshop is a feat. Because of this, some clients might place the tutor in a role of authority, which could create unnecessary distance between the tutor and the client. In medicine, a way to foster ethical communication is through shared decision-making and openness because it grants space for both the patient's voice and the practitioner's, and the same applies to the client-tutor dyad (Charles, Gafni & Whelan, 1999; Kuipers, Cramm & Nieboer, 2016; Kuper, 2007).

Unlike communication centers, medicine has the advantage of connecting an ancient oath to their ethical foundation, which can serve as a standard to reference. Over two thousand years old, the Hippocratic Oath is a declaration of beliefs, attitudes, and values physicians apply to the ethical practice of medicine. It is a professional standard as well as a promise to adhere to that standard (Greek Medicine, 2012). Though it is not mandatory, some may incorporate this oath into the ritual of becoming a physician, signifying the momentous transition from student to clinician. While communication centers do not need something as grand as an ancient oath, centers might consider establishing a modernized code or pledge that reflects the ethical and cultural aims of their organization.

A code or pledge is different from a mission statement. While a mission

statement communicates the organization's overall purpose, a code or pledge focuses on the individuals who constitute the norms of the organization. A way to reinforce these differences is through deliberate phrasing using statements beginning with "I" such as "I will…" so the focus stays on the oath-taker. Such phrasing is peppered throughout the Hippocratic Oath. For example, the importance of patient confidentiality is stated in the oath as follows: "Whatever I see or hear in the lives of my patients, whether in connection with my professional practice or not, which ought not to be spoken of outside, I will keep secret, as considering all such things to be private" (Greek Medicine, 2012). Operating through an established code (that perhaps the staff develops together) places an onus on the employee and may increase their stakeholdership. It may solidify their feelings of unity because they will be working under a standard they set together. The code might also help tutors engage in sensemaking when addressing an unfamiliar subject matter or interacting with a taxing client.

Though not directly stated in the Hippocratic Oath, "do no harm" is often associated with the oath and could be said to help guide physicians' decision-making processes. Likewise, a tutor could reference their center's pledge or code when faced with complexity, asking themselves, *"am I doing harm? Is my role in this tutoring session creating more harm than good?"* If the answer is "yes" or "maybe," that is a signal to repair the dynamics of the exchange or terminate the session.

Technology

The healthcare industry's use of technology can offer insight into ways centers might further incorporate technology. Like many public speakers, healthcare practitioners may prefer in-person communication as opposed to a digital exchange. Because the two mediums are different, certain nuances that "land well" with audiences during an in-person speech may not be well received during an online performance. For some speakers, their use of humor or use of small gestures (like feet movement or a shift in one's body weight, for example) are not communicated with the same effectiveness as they would be in-person. Similarly, during a telemedicine exchange, clinicians may not interpret a patient's explanation of symptoms in the same way they would in a face-to-face exchange. And yet, different does not necessarily mean worse. Recorded speeches are asynchronous and have the advantage (or disadvantage, depending on one's preferences) of "multiple redos." If presenting in real-time using a screen-share format, students have the ability to highlight visual aids that may have been overlooked by an in-person audience.

In the context of healthcare's slow but ongoing adoption of electronic medical records, nurses and doctors with established workflow patterns are oftentimes less than eager to adopt new technologies (Barrett, 2018). The same might be said with tutors in communication centers. For example, our communication center's staff must input each client visit into FileMaker Pro for a digital record of who is using our services and for what purpose. If a client's visit is related to a specific class, an email is sent to the client's professor confirming the date, duration, and subject matter addressed. Data input requires a time commitment that may burden the center's staff as it often does in the healthcare field with data

entry into the electronic medical record system. However, once the data are digitized, the client, professor, and center have a digital text to reference, just as patients and healthcare practitioners have with their record system, which can improve the organization of information and increase access (Hillestad et al., 2005).

Though staff are likely to maintain their preferences, both mediums should be utilized, especially considering how the recent COVID-19 context forced even the latest of adopters into the video conferencing realm. Like other educational settings, some communication centers like ours moved online during the pandemic, hosting workshops and tutoring sessions in real-time and recorded form. Centers can expand their reach by maintaining existing online connections they formed during COVID-19 or creating new online pathways for students using online platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Blackboard, or Canvas. Centers might also consider engaging social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube (see Clements, Foltz, & Gullo, 2019).

Commuters or distance learners in online programs are just two examples of populations who may not frequent a communication center because of limitations like geographic distance or standard hours of in-person operation. Supplementing face-to-face services with digital services can widen the window of access, which requires a certain level of support from the staff who are tasked to communicate using both mediums (Chae & Shin, 2016).

Practical Implications

Each of the professions discussed require communication skills and ethical training as well as technical and professional development. Regardless of one's experience or interest in the law, business, or healthcare, a takeaway is communication centers can build a professional expectation into their organizational structure or, if they have already done this, they can reevaluate their center's practices through the lens of these three professions. In Table 1, we offer best practices then review key takeaways. Following, we propose a continuing education credit program for directors and other leaders of communication centers to consider adopting.

A shared trait across the three professions was the ability to adopt to current or new technologies. As we experienced during COVID-19 shutdowns, technology is an integral part of the workforce, especially when an organization is responsible for delivering a service, which communication centers certainly are. Regardless of the specific industry, virtual meetings and appointments exposed organizations' adaptability during a time when almost all professional communication was mediated. Another lesson that emerged from a parallel among the three fields was the emphasis on ethics and ethical traditions connected to best practices in one's profession. For example, communication center staff may value shared decision-making, or the practice of active listening, or value maintaining respect for the clients' privacy when they share personal details about speaking apprehension or other issues a tutor or a client deems private. The core beliefs and values of a center should be solidified as part of a center's ethical framework. The most useful finding we identified from our examination of the three fields in connection with centers was the emphasis on ongoing training and

continued education. The next section proposes a continuing education credit program that awards certification to those who complete it. We argue such a program is a much-needed intervention that has the potential to enhance the quality of the organization, its staff, and the tutoring process.

Proposing a Continuing Education Credit Program

After examining the parallels and differences among law, business, and healthcare as they are applied to communication centers, the authors suggest readers who are invested in founding or further developing a communication center seriously consider establishing a continuing education credit (CEC) program for their centers and its staff. The primary goal is to provide center staff with opportunities for ongoing training and education, which might improve a center's organizational structure in two main ways: CEC may enhance the quality of the tutoring process, which benefits tutors, clients, the center, and the university, and CEC may improve the quality of the staff's experience in their positions as tutors, which could aid retention efforts and foster a common dialogue of center-related education across staff. A CEC program is a practical way to weave in important issues like ethical communication, advanced training specific to technology, networking, and critical reflection. Certification should be granted to tutors who complete the program.

Table 1: Best Practices Applicable to Communication Centers

Law	Business	Healthcare
Testing and continued education credits	Org. Comm. training; exposure to theory	Reflection rooted in ethics, continued credits
Pro bono or volunteer	Networking and skill building	Adopt CCT (client-centered tutoring)
Tech. training	Learn company and dept. tech.	Adopt and adapt to new tech
Ensure trust	Corporate mentoring/ resource groups	Examine comm style
Ethics-specific training	Develop best practices	Craft a code of ethics
Peer review system	Vertical and horizontal comm.	Critique power dynamics
Problem-solving skills	Team Approach	Promote shared decision-making

The CEC program should be separated into sections we refer to as "milestones" that exist within four categories. The purpose of the certification process is twofold: to provide markers for levels of CEC education and to create an environment

that fosters participation in the CEC program. Research shows achievable milestones encourage continued participation in programs (Musthag et al., 2011; Hedge, 2013; Throne et al., 2015; Waugh, 2016).

While the actual requirements of each milestone should be determined by individual centers based on the organization's needs, we suggest categorizing the CEC program's areas and intended outcomes into four categories: communication skills, professional development, interpersonal training, and ethics. To complete the milestones that exist under each of the four categories, a tutor should attain a certain number of credits, and these credits are determined by the director of whomever is leading the CEC program based on the perceived value of the event. For example, attending an on-campus lecture focused on professionalism hosted by career services might be worth a smaller number of credits compared to a tutor completing a mentoring dyad or developing their own public speaking workshop on a specific topic. The level of complexity and time required to complete an educational activity/participate in an event should be considered when determining the number of credits one can earn.

When developing and implementing a CEC program, it is important to consider whether to incorporate follow-up assessments or reflections connected to either each event or connected to each of the four categories (or the overall experience). If assessments or reflections are not appealing, some form of evaluation to measure the objectives of the CEC program experience is needed.

To help practice horizontal communication, the staff could vote on the period by which these credits are due (each academic year, perhaps). Staff could utilize platforms like GroupMe to share details and invite one another to events that count toward earning credit. For example, a tutor could attend a workshop, training, or other professional development activities offered on campus, in the community, or online that will benefit their future work in the center. Alternatively, the center could ask tutors to develop their own opportunities for their colleagues, which could then be repeated outside the center or recorded and shared online. Topics covered in a CEC workshop could include a wide range of professional development skills and activities highlighted in Table 1 and should incorporate an element of ethics.

An example of a fruitful topic is trust building between tutor and client. Confidentiality exists in the legal and medical professions to encourage clients/patients to disclose when seeking advice or care. Students may be more willing to share if they know that what is said will not be repeated. Another example of a CEC workshop is "centering in the center," which could involve a short reading describing patient-centered care (PCC) then a roundtable for tutors to discuss the ways in which this approach parallels CCT (client-centered tutoring) and what CCT means to them. Role playing could be incorporated to reassure tutors who want to see how this might look in the everyday context, especially with a difficult student whose needs and wants compete with the tutor's.

Regarding technology, there are two main areas where a CEC program may benefit tutors: record keeping and alternative tutoring formats. Using software to track appointments and the services offered may help a center

customize its offerings to a student population. Data may also be used to generate reports that can help administration make decisions related to budgets. Offering virtual appointments enhances the possibility of attracting more students who are commuters or those who are part time students. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the workforce's ability to continue to function, albeit in a digital space. This may increase traffic in a center, even if it is not physical foot traffic.

Discussion

Implementing a continuing education credit program can aid organizational development and benefit the students who work at a center as well as those who visit it. Each of the professions we discussed require professional development, training, networking, and interpersonal as well as ethical communication. The CEC program we propose allows participants to earn credits within a specific window of time, resulting in a certification of communication proficiency, which will help tutors and those they serve. Research reflects the beneficial role communication centers play in enhancing the skills of its tutors, ranging from conflict resolution and interpersonal skills, to improving their own public speaking skills, to raising their emotional intelligence, tutoring is an immensely beneficial work experience (LaGrone & Mills, 2020; Tonkins, 2018; Ward & Schwartzman, 2009). A CEC program can encourage individual and team-based growth in the skills tutors are learning and refining in their everyday work environment.

The CEC program would require ongoing evaluation, as communication is a disciplinethat is constantly evolving. If CEC programs become popular enough to standardize them across communication centers, a network could be established devoted to CEC efforts and, perhaps in the future, a governing board to identify key measures, best practices, and metrics to ensure course material is consistent and success is measured equally. This will ultimately allow CEC programs to align with accreditation procedures. By standardizing the process, it will ensure key themes and learning objectives are met across all participating centers and instilled in those participating in the programs.

Conclusion

As a discipline, communication celebrates interdisciplinarity. As scholars who examine law, business, and healthcare through a communication studies lens, it is fitting to examine how the norms and practices of different fields contrast and overlap with the norms and practices of communication centers. In line with interdisciplinarity, communication centers serve a diverse population of students who study areas across the hard and soft sciences, which is one reason why recruiting and retaining quality tutors who feel supported through ongoing training opportunities is crucial. It is in the best interest of a center to consider developing a continued education credit program using the guidelines we provide to better prepare tutors and maintain the quality of its services. Centers should continue to emphasize ethics and technology and identify educational areas of interest specific to communication studies. Incorporating lessons from law, business, and healthcare into the organizational practices of a communication center may increase its growing potential.

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