

## Peer Tutoring and Tutor Training: A Historical Perspective

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When marketing for new students is more costly than retaining existing students, budgets are tighter than ever, and campus administrations seek to improve student retention and success, it is important to note what the research says about the history and importance of tutoring and tutor training. Tinto (2004) listed tutoring, mentoring, study groups, and Supplemental Instruction (SI) as academic support services that institutions can provide to enhance retention and graduation rates. He noted how critical it is for academic support programs not to stand alone but rather to be connected and linked to the curriculum. Tinto believed it was crucial that “students [be] able to make meaningful connections between the knowledge and skills they are acquiring in the support programs and those needed to succeed in their credit-bearing curriculum” (p. 8).

Though deplored as a recent problem, student “underpreparedness” for college is not a new phenomenon in higher education in the United States (Sheets, 1994). Many administrators and even academic support professionals may be unaware that the need for tutoring has existed throughout the history of our educational institutions. Tutoring has been provided in some form since Harvard opened its doors in 1636 as America’s first college (Maxwell, 1997; Rudolph, 1962/1999; for historical timeline graphic see Sheets, 2011). Many of Harvard’s incoming students were not yet proficient in Latin, which was the only language to be spoken in its halls. The college provided tutors to help these elite and wealthy students acquire the proficiency they needed to succeed.

It was the nineteenth century before English was studied in place of the traditional Greek or Latin at U.S. universities, beginning with what is now New York University (Dempsey, 1979). Starting in the 1800s, other changes occurred that opened higher education to the general population. These included the establishment of the Columbia Institute for the Deaf (now Gallaudet College) and the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, which established land-grant colleges and eventually led to creation of historically Black colleges and universities in the U.S. In 1901, the first junior college, Joliet Junior College, was established to provide programs and credits that could be transferred to the University of Chicago (Gutek, 1986). Though opportunity to study at postsecondary institutions was thus broadened, even the elite schools considered their students ill prepared for college; as Maxwell (1997) noted, in 1907 over half the students enrolled at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia had failed to meet college entrance requirements.

Until the 1960s, specific tutoring content and circumstances were poorly documented. Tutoring was usually an informal service, often volunteered and privately arranged. Beginning in the 1960s, colleges and universities began to receive government aid to provide higher education to lower-income or minority groups. Campus programs and departments began to establish more formal tutoring services targeted to specific student groups (Maxwell, 1997) like students with low family incomes, students considered underprepared for college, women students, or students of color.

In 1972, at California State University-Long Beach, Christ (1971) created a unique Learning Assistance Support System model “where learners, learner data, and learning facilitators are interwoven into a sequential, cybernetic, individualized, people-oriented system to service all students (learners) and faculty (learning facilitators) of any institution for whom learning by its students is important” (p. 39). This new model transformed the services and support programs offered to students at many colleges and universities. Instead of tutorial support services available only to specific, limited, targeted groups, in this new model, support services were expanded to all. Stanford University opened a new learning assistance center (LAC) in the summer of 1972 for students demonstrating the potential to succeed but needing remedial support. By 1973, its LAC expanded services to include all students (Walker, 1980).

The need to provide tutoring support services for all students continues at many institutions. Despite increases in the numbers of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high

school, nearly one-third (31%) of all entering first-year college students responding to a recent Higher Education Research Institute survey said they believed they would need to get tutoring in specific courses for college (Pryor, 2011). Institutions generally recognize the importance of providing the tutoring students need: nearly 90% of community colleges surveyed by Gerlaugh, Thompson, Boylan, and Davis (2007) offered tutoring.

If the need for tutoring has been long and broad, then equally important should be training tutors to meet that need. Boylan, Bonham, and Bliss (1994) reported that 70% of the nation's tutorial programs surveyed had a training component. Does tutor training matter? Maxwell, in her (1990) review of the literature on tutoring, identified training for peer tutors as essential for successful tutoring programs in colleges and universities. Training is needed to "provide tutors with the information, strategies, and resources to help students become independent learners and attain their educational goals" (Rings & Sheets, 1991, p. 32). Grounded in a theoretical framework of constructivism and metacognition, training can provide tutors with the problem-solving and self-monitoring strategies needed to empower students to build knowledge and learn. Together, constructivism and metacognition build a foundation from which tutors can receive training to help students assess their own needs, identify needed strategies, and evaluate effectiveness in learning new information.

The National Center for Developmental Education at Appalachian State University studied over 6,000 students enrolled in basic skill development courses at 2- and 4-year institutions in the United States (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997). Their initial review of the data on tutoring programs found no relationship between tutoring and student grade point average (GPA) or retention. However, when they considered the impact only of tutoring programs with a training component, Boylan, Bliss, and Bonham (1997) concluded that tutor training is one of the best indicators of a successful college developmental education program. Their findings were impressive: compared to students who did not participate in tutoring, students who participated in tutoring were more likely to achieve passing grades in developmental English and also had better grades overall in their first college term. In addition, students of trained tutors at 4-year institutions not only earned higher cumulative GPAs but also demonstrated higher retention rates (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997). Tutoring provided by tutors in programs without training programs had no effect on retention or grades.

This study confirmed earlier research studies that also found it essential to train tutors. Casazza and Silverman (1996) stated that solid tutor training that included learning theory, metacognition, motivation, and more) was a key component in most successful development programs. In my own dissertation study of the extent to which training and experience affected peer tutors, I found significant differences in responses of tutors receiving at least 10 hours of training (Sheets, 1994). In the few topics examined, tutors receiving at least 1 hour of active listening training also showed significant differences in their responses from those who did not. This study used ten recommended mentors in the field to calibrate the test instrument used as the pretest and posttest instrument to rate tutor responses.

The need for academic support and appropriate tutor training has been recognized by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2010). For the last 30 years, CAS has been developing, publishing, and promoting standards among its 40 member organizations, which together represent more than 100,000 professionals, and to North American higher educational institutions. In 2010 the new CAS standards for functional areas were made available online to CAS member organizations. The College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) could post the standards and guidelines for Learning Assistance Programs (LAP) free of charge to CRLA members, including LAC and tutoring management professionals, faculty, and staff. The CAS standards for Learning Assistance Programs require professional learning assistance staff to "ensure that staff members understand their responsibilities by receiving appropriate training" (CAS, 2010, p. 8), and establish procedures for training (p. 9).

CAS standards provided the impetus for CRLA to design standards for tutor training for program certification, known as CRLA International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC; CRLA, 2011b). The concept of certifying the quality of tutor training programs was conceived in 1985 at a CRLA conference, presented in 1986, and developed over a 3-year period, to become CRLA's ITTPC (originally ITCP) in 1989 (Sheets, 2010).

Tutor training program certification has become more widely recognized as a means to provide consistent, high-quality academic support. Tutor training program certification through CRLA is noted as "one of the most effective ways to improve tutor training" (Boylan, 2002, p. 50). CRLA's ITTPC program has continued to grow to over 800 CRLA-certified tutor training programs during ITTPC's first 2 decades within the U.S., and ITTPC now includes programs in six countries outside the U.S. (CRLA, 2011a).

In the next few decades, despite advances in technology, access to information, and more technology options available to all, tutoring and the need to train tutors will continue. In his "learning college" of the future, O'Banion (1997) identified tutor-led groups as a needed learning option for the future. Returning to research by Tinto (2004) about what students need for success, learning assistance professionals can predict that meaningful connections between knowledge and skills acquired in and out of class will continue to be facilitated by well-trained tutors.

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