Toward An Inclusive Tutoring Ecology

Maggie Laurel Boyd
Boston University

Hunter Hobbs
University of Georgia

Meiya Sparks Lin
Boston University

Introduction

In April 2025, as tutors reflected together after our latest training on "Inclusive Tutoring," one tutor offered a striking thought: "It's heartening that so many of these strategies are the normal ones we use anyway." As she identified, so much of our tutoring methodology creates space for inclusion: asking questions, actively listening, modeling collaboration, adopting an encouraging and constructive tone, being responsive and generally centering student agency. We emphasize in our conversations with each other and with our students that communicating is a collaborative and contextual process, sharpened through dialogue and rooted in the situation of that student, that day, that project, that audience. Scholars from both writing centers and communication centers have established that, at their best, these centers are thereby poised to be transformative spaces (Aikens, 2019; Bokser, 2005; Konrad, 2016). Functioning as a "contact zone in which students and staff learn to negotiate multiple subject positions as they rhetorically negotiate multiple discourses within and outside of the academy," a communication center ideally fosters generative conversations across difference (Bawarshi and Pelkowski, 1999, p. 44; see also Baker, 2006). And, given the reality that "*all* students have different abilities, types of knowledge, and literacies" and "*all* students can benefit from engaging with texts in different ways," these conversations might be particularly successful in one-on-one contexts in which instructors are already trained to adapt to student needs (Hitt, 2012).

At the same time, communication center staff, from tutors to directors, must make an engaged effort to access and actualize this potential, lest these sites slip into enforcing hegemonic norms (Cirillo-McCarthy, 2022). Often imagined as welcoming safe spaces, communication centers can still participate in and propagate "the dialectic of management and control" that pervades academic institutions (García, 2017, p. 48). Indeed, centers may not feel welcoming nor safe for marginalized students. We may get bogged down in discussing 'correct' writing or 'good' speaking—two false promises that work to dismiss non-dominant discursive modes and their users (Greenfield, 2011; Matsuda, 2006; Young, 2010). When we emphasize standards "rooted in a particular conception of middle-class whiteness," then we may lead students to "devalue their own voices and ideas"—a devaluing which may occur subtly, as when

tip sheets incorporate examples largely from white discourse (Silva and Wiebel, 2024, p. 4, 7; Nguyễn, 2021). Given that "academic language is raced, classed, and otherwise privileged," tutoring in communication centers can easily become complicit in perpetuating that privilege (Aikens 2019). After all, neither writing nor speaking are "ideologically innocent" or inherently empowering, and as gatekeepers to these practices—that is, as presumed experts—communication center staff have a responsibility to make students "aware of the extent to which discourse constructs reality and their place within it" (Bawarshi and Pelkowski, 1999, p. 46, 53). Our standard strategies might dovetail with anti-oppressive ones, but we cannot simply assume as much; instead, we need "proactive positioning" that "seeks to push tutor-mentors beyond knowing that racism is harmful, to proactively looking out for ways to make the center unsuitable for and intolerant of practices and belief systems that further harmful behavior" (Faleyimu, 2023, p. 55). Inclusion requires this level of intention and attention to our students, our tutors and our larger university communities.

So, how do we ensure that we are doing the work to facilitate inclusion? How do we make sure our 'normal' operations maximize access and belonging for all of our students and minimize harm to any? These questions have been guiding us over the past year, when our program entered a moment of transition. Preparing to overhaul our training model, we seized the opportunity to focus on inclusion as essential to our success, making it a foundational element of our tutoring ecology—a term we use to denote the broad networks that constitute the space of a tutoring session and the work that happens within it. In what follows, we explain and examine these recent efforts, which range from multi-step training activities to simple logistical updates. We categorize them into two main pathways: (1) expanding tutors' vocabularies and (2) expanding students' access. Additionally, two tutors share reflections on how this work has influenced their tutoring methods and mindsets.

As every center is structured slightly differently, before beginning in earnest, we will describe our program. First, we have long specialized in writing, so the work described in the following sections deals primarily with tutoring writing. And yet, reviewing existing scholarship from both writing center studies and communication center studies, as well as consulting with speaking center directors, has indicated that writing/speaking/communication tutoring models significantly overlap, thus sharing both promises and pitfalls. Moreover, our program has recently expanded into the communication center territory after adding appointments to discuss students' public speaking projects. As our center moves into this line of work, we have found it generative to apply the inclusive practices we have developed to both our writing and speaking appointments. In outlining those practices, we aim to showcase strategies toward expanding inclusivity that communication center staff can consider adopting in their own programs.

Located at a large, private, R1 university, our program is open to all students from all programs—whether they are earning a PhD in chemistry, or a first-year undergraduate taking a history course, or even an alum applying to medical school. We work with students on any project, at any stage in the process. We typically employ a relatively small group of tutors—approximately 10-12—and all of our tutors are graduate students, coming from various

disciplines and pursuing various degrees (PhDs, MAs, MDs, DMAs, MSs and so on). As a result, we do not have a tutoring pedagogy course; because it would not fulfill our tutors' graduate degree requirements, few would be able to devote time to it. Instead, our training entails a full-day orientation before the academic year, and then one-hour bi-weekly meetings to provide updates, problem-solve, work through a pedagogical activity and ultimately boost camaraderie—which itself can contribute to inclusivity by disrupting the binaries that uphold exclusionary practices (Cirillo-McCarthy, 2022). We found that, even with such limited opportunities for pedagogy, we could still make strides toward a more inclusive tutoring ecology. Across the many contexts of communication centers, we hope that these reflections and recommendations can support practitioners in making progress in this direction, as well.

Expanding Tutors' Vocabularies

Numerous scholars have pinpointed training as an opportunity to promote inclusive tutoring practices—*if* it is a fully integrated component and not a mere one-off lesson (Aikens, 2019; Daniels et. al., 2015, p. 25; Diab et. al., 2012, p. 1; Faleyimu, 2023, p. 54; Lampkin, 2017). Framing our enhanced training as 'expanding tutors' vocabularies' prepares us to cultivate dynamic insights rather than didactic instructions. We thus shift away from the "toolkit teaching model" that some have critiqued, which might imply a collection of static equipment that can fix what is broken (Diab et. al., 2012, p. 2). We move toward a vocabulary, which connotes an ever-evolving, highly contextual, collaborative corpus of meaning that gets negotiated between people. Experts have agreed that inclusive, access-oriented pedagogies must be flexible (Dembsey, 2020, p. 8; Diab et. al., p. 2; Hitt, 2012; Konrad, 2016). Communication centers fundamentally revolve around encounters between tutors and tutees, as well as between tutors and staff, and tutees and their professors or classmates and so on—and we can't predict what shape those encounters will take (García, 2017, p. 48). We therefore need to be ready to respond in the moment to the particularities of a given interaction. Students often arrive feeling vulnerable about their writing and often even more nervous about their public speaking, which they know will need to occur in the moment *and* in front of a wider audience than just a professor. In addition to these stressors, students may be worried about how their language is perceived: are they fluent enough? Formal enough? Clear enough? Again, these worries appear in writing consultations but often become intensified in presentation consultations, where students might feel more likely to be judged and less able to adjust their language on the spot. With broader vocabularies, tutors gain more language to attend to and address these concerns and thus more flexibility in how they handle these encounters so as to best maximize inclusion.

To engender this level of flexibility, we embedded a variety of vocabulary-building exercises into our training throughout the year. We began simply, when, during our annual orientation, we considered the idea of "safe enough spaces" (Pipe and Stephens, 2024). The now-notorious 'safe space' has not only been ridiculed in right wing media but also usefully critiqued as valuing students' comfort over inviting them into the uncomfortable work of resisting harmful ideologies, and soothing some students' at the expense of others (Aikens, 2019; García, 2017, p.

48; Villano, 2020, p. 120). Instead, the 'safe enough space' refers to a place where we feel challenged, maybe even forced out of our comfort zones, but simultaneously empowered to take on those challenges. In a "safe enough space," no one experiences harassment or violence and everyone both provides and receives the grace necessary to tackle the vulnerable process of learning, of trying new practices and ideas.

Through this concept, tutors began considering the *ecology* of tutoring—the people and spaces that any tutoring session entangles, and the demands on one another that emerge as a result. Because communication is deeply relational, and access, too, is deeply relational, those of us invested in shepherding students to become more confident, capable communicators must ourselves become confident, capable relationship builders (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Ede, 1989; Konrad, 2016). An inclusive tutoring ecology would approach those relationships with care, negotiating collaborative modes that can effectively navigate challenging conversations. After all, a tutoring environment must be sufficiently encouraging for students to feel willing to work on their project—often a daunting task—and sufficiently engaging for tutors to feel willing to provide feedback—often a demanding task. If students feel they will be judged, they might not want to share their insights; if tutors feel the student doesn't care, they might not want to share *their* insights. Meanwhile, the tutoring environment must also be sufficiently stimulating that students feel prompted to develop their projects and skills, and that tutors see opportunities to do that prompting. Of course, if there is any form of harassment on either side, the possibility for a meaningful relationship—encouraging, engaging, stimulating—evaporates. We thereby started the year with a term, but to become fluent in a vocabulary requires more than memorizing a dictionary. Next, tutors would need to visualize putting inclusive practices into action.

Given our program structure, we cannot insist that tutors spend considerable time on scholarship, but we have strategized ways to sporadically assign readings, like sending an article out a month in advance and telling tutors to complete it during an empty shift (if necessary, we will block an hour in their schedules). This system not only pays them for training activities but also creates time in their busy lives to do that work. For our first reading, we went in an unconventional direction with a piece from the short-story writer Lydia Davis rather than from a scholarly tradition. Davis's "Thirty Recommendations for Good Writing Habits" (2019) was a beneficial choice because it can be easy for tutors and students alike to conceptualize communication as a purely cerebral activity, one half of a Cartesian split between mind and body. But research has emphasized that communicating—and tutoring—depend on embodied experience (Cirillo-McCarthy, 2022; Hitt, 2012). By acknowledging the complex lived realities that collide in a tutoring appointment, we can better include those complexities. And, because Davis's tips attune to the relationship between the writer and the material world, the essay usefully—and sometimes humorously—emphasizes the significance of the physical environment, and its sensorial aspects, as one axis of the broader tutoring ecology in which tutors are immersed. Davis's final tip, to "maintain humility with regard to language and writing," evokes the mindset of an inclusive tutor—someone who is ready to learn, to listen, to lay down their own expectations and even expertise to engage with others (262).

Another axis revolves around the content itself, which may—intentionally or not—rely on damaging assumptions or reify stereotypes. What can we do when a student brings a paper seemingly arguing in favor of "build a wall" rhetoric or, during a presentation on college admissions, states that certain races can only get accepted via affirmative action? To build vocabulary to handle these sorts of scenarios, our next reading-and-discussion activity introduced tutors to anti-racist scholarship and guided them toward reflection. We know that reflection can be an essential activity in counteracting harmful ideologies, especially in providing an opportunity to consciously, and conscientiously, consider how those ideologies might manifest (Diab et. al., 2012, p. 2, 4; Faleyimu, 2023, p. 52; García, 2017, p. 50; Silva and Wiebel, 2024, p. 3). Building time into our trainings for tutors to consider their positionality and that of their students ensures that they can access these benefits *and* be prompted to turn those reflective moments into action. With these aims in mind, our tutors read Mandy Suhr-Sytsma and Shan-Estelle Brown's "Theory In/To Practice: Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center" and then discussed their two heuristics, one of which details how language can cause harm and the other of which details how tutors can gently, generatively intervene in such harmful language (Suhr-Sytsma and Brown, 2011, p. 22). Although many tutors already knew that language can be a tool of oppression, they appreciated these practical approaches to addressing any such language in the tutoring context. We contemplated which strategies we found most useful and situations where we had or might face these issues. The conversation that ensued was thoughtful and thought-provoking, and, importantly, centered this work as a key responsibility of a tutoring appointment. Tutors were notably excited about suggestions to discuss potential audience reactions ('a reader or listener might think A') and "clarify meanings together" ('do you mean B?') as avenues toward anti-racist tutoring, because these seemed intuitive for incubating both inclusion *and* strong communication (Suhr-Sytsma and Brown, 2011, p. 26, 35). Our discussion therefore offered tutors strategies as well as a sense of intention; even if these were 'normal' techniques, tutors now understood how those techniques could relate and respond to oppressive language. Moreover, tutors began to realize when and how to intervene, with an increased pool of phrases that they could use to engage tutees in challenging conversations. Because we found this seminar-style format successfully sparked the tutors to deliberate on their tutoring practices, we committed to doing it again.

In the spring session, we pivoted to yet another axis of the tutoring experience: working with multi-lingual writers. In our meeting on Suhr-Sytsma and Brown, we had touched on the perceived supremacy of Standard Academic English as an oppressive narrative, but also one that students may feel pressured to adopt. Tutors posed questions about how to balance those demands, and we thought together about how to present US academic communication as one genre among many, each with their own norms, contexts and value. We extended this discussion further with "Reading an ESL Writer's Text" by Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox (2011). Like Suhr-Sytsma and Brown, Matsuda and Cox locate their recommendations in the specific space of tutoring and target them to be highly practical, so they can be immediately integrated into one's tutoring practice. With Matsuda's and Cox's insights guiding us, we went deeper into

the myths surrounding Standard Academic English and the harms they cause. As an additional source of insight, tutors reviewed a one-page summary of Michelle Cox's "'Noticing' Language in the Writing Center" (2018), which lays out defining characteristics of Academic English and tutoring tactics that attend to ELL students' needs, specifically (Cox, 2018, p. 153, 152). For example, Cox prompted us to consider both the premise of writer-responsible text—wherein the onus is on the communicator to express themselves clearly rather than on the reader/listener to figure it out—and its manifestations in topic sentences, transition words, forecasting statements and so on. From these sessions, we found that these scholarly articles provide lenses into inclusive tutoring models and mindsets that felt navigable to a wide range of tutors, who possess varying levels of existing knowledge about rhetoric scholarship—and that handouts offered a way to distill major takeaways when we only have an hour to discuss them.

In addition to reading *about* such practices, tutors would surely benefit from trying out those practices to ensure they felt possible and productive rather than intimidating or intense. For that, we needed to create a "safe enough space" during our meetings. For guidance, we turned to our university's experts: our Diversity & Inclusion Office, whose staff have the knowledge to guide students through these issues with the requisite care. They were willing to lead a workshop specifically on navigating the micro-aggressions that might affect a tutoring appointment. With our facilitator, Annabelle, we determined that we would present and process several case studies, each designed to reflect a different source of microaggression that could appear in the tutoring appointment. Annabelle suggested we involve the tutors in writing these scenarios; this strategy not only tapped into the tutors' insights but also heightened their investment. Please find our co-written case studies below:

- *Scenario #1 [microaggression in student writing]*: While reading her tutee's paper, as she pieces together the argument, Abigail begins to feel uncomfortable with the claims she is seeing. Adam, a sophomore taking an International Relations class, seems to be asserting that the War in Afghanistan was necessary and even good, in part because the Afghan people "needed to be saved" and "don't have the capacity themselves to usher in stability." As she keeps reading, Adam's tone strikes Abigail as patronizing, and she notices that he uncritically assumes that American values are superior. Abigail pauses and first asks Adam to describe his argument out loud to her, at which point he confirms that he is indeed arguing along these lines. How should Abigail proceed?
- *Scenario #2 [student shares experience of microaggression]*: Tessie, a Black first-year student, arrives for an appointment to discuss a 4-page essay on colonialism in Peru. When her Writing Fellow, Wally, asks her if there are any particular concerns she wants to discuss, Tessie shares, "Not really—my professor told me I should come here because I will need help adjusting to college standards." Wally asks if the professor had provided more specific feedback on previous assignments, and Tessie says, "No, she hasn't read my writing yet, actually, but I guess she thought it would be good for me to come." Wally knows that this professor is white and suspects that she has made assumptions about Tessie's background based on her race. How should Wally respond?

- *Scenario #3 [student gives feedback that WF made a microaggression]*: Charles, a Writing Fellow, is working with a student named River. River has written a 5-page paper for their history class and marked "Developing Argument" as the reason for their appointment. They are quiet and speak with an accent but have not asked for help on their English language skills. Impressed by their writing, Charles exclaims, "you're actually really good at English!" In response, River tells Charles, "I don't think that's fair —I'm confident in my English and my ability to speak multiple languages has made me a stronger writer. Please don't assume things about me based on my accent." How should Charles respond?
- *Scenario #4 [student makes microaggression to WF]*: A student, Neil, brings in an outline analyzing the Fenway Group's management decisions of the Red Sox. He plans to consider how ownership has previously spent money on players as compared to their current financial decisions. His outline is not all that developed, but he is talkative, showcasing his knowledge about current Red Sox players and contracts. His Writing Fellow, Caroline, suggests that he incorporate cost-effectiveness analysis to look at trades, like the one with Mookie Betts. Neil responds dismissively, saying, "hm, you're probably not familiar with this stuff," before continuing to talk about recent baseball news. How should Caroline respond?

Then, during the workshop itself, tutors had the chance to consult on relevant frameworks and collaborate on how they could lead conversations to counteract these forms of harm. Tutors reported that they left the workshop with a stronger sense into when and why to center inclusion in our appointments, as well as how they might do so (and how *not* to do so).

To better understand the tutors' experience of our varied efforts to strengthen their vocabularies, we will now turn to two tutors' reflections on what this work has meant for, and to, them. Then, we move to a discussion about expanding students' access, which covers the more logistical avenues we have taken toward centering inclusion in our center's broader tutoring ecology. Finally, we touch on our next steps, which will keep the iterative processes of both inclusion and tutoring front-of-mind for our team and in our space.

Tutor Reflection From Hunter Hobbs

My first tutoring job was at a small community college in North Carolina. During our new-hire training, the lead tutor summed up our lab's central pedagogical philosophy as follows: "Feel, felt, found." This was a shorthand intended to remind us to relate empathetically to our students, by ensuring them that we, as current or former students ourselves, know how they feel; that we, too, have felt the same way; and, finally, that a solution can be found.

I still find this motto helpful today, and I think it is founded on the correct assumption that there is some uniformity to the college experience. That is, as students, we all know how it feels to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the task in front of us. But we also know how it feels to keep going anyway, and to push through—either with a little help from our peers and instructors, or by sheer force of will—until the task is completed.

So, the ubiquity of this experience creates a basis for a lot of very helpful vicarious introspection between tutor and tutee, because the two are, at least in this one respect, very much in the same boat. But of course there are limits to the applicability of "feel, felt, found," and ignoring these limits can create a tutoring experience that is at the very least unhelpful, and at worst outright harmful, to the tutee.

Even in my earliest days of tutoring I was made very aware of the limits of empathetic connection, as I began to have meetings in which students would either explicitly describe or implicitly hint at their experiences with discrimination in academia. And in those situations I was at a loss, to such a degree that I found myself enacting the reverse of our motto: I do not know how you feel; I have never felt that way; I am unable to help you find a solution. To say any more would be to minimize the degree of my own privilege.

What I began to develop as a tutor at BU was a more extensive vocabulary surrounding this idea of the limits of empathy. Or, to state it in the positive, I was given the language to better appreciate the uniqueness of individual experience. During our training sessions and in weekly meetings, we were encouraged to name and discuss the societal prejudices which often invade the academic space, as well as those prejudices which are specific to the academic space—namely, those which privilege certain forms of knowledge and knowledge production over others.

As I look back, I can point to two areas of personal improvement that are direct results of these sessions. First, I feel I have become a more acute monitor of my own behaviors during a tutoring appointment. That is, I am more attuned not only to how I might be enacting my own prejudices, but also to how well-intentioned empathy can in fact contribute to the erasure of a student's unique reality and experience. Second, I feel as though I am more equipped to spot implicit pedagogical biases as they arise, whether that be in a student's description of a potentially harmful encounter with an instructor, or in biased language that might appear in a particular prompt or syllabus. Of course as tutors there is very little we can do in the way of changing course assignments or syllabi, but at the very least we can try to honor the heterogeneity of student experience, even as academia is at times hell-bent in producing a certain homogeneity among its students.

Tutor Reflection From Meiya Sparks Lin

Although I would consider myself familiar with DEI practices, most of the training I received prior to my tutoring position was focused on classroom pedagogy. There are certain rhetorical tools that translate easily from the classroom to the writing session (e.g., establishing clear goals and next steps with the writer). I quickly realized, however, that tutoring necessitated an adapted set of inclusive strategies. With only a forty-five minute session to build rapport with tutees and collaboratively improve their skillset, the stakes of each moment felt higher. Intervening to redirect students' writing away from unintentionally using oppressive language, for example, looked different for a tutee with whom I had spent only one or two tutoring sessions than with a student whose writing I had engaged with for several months.

Overall, our most helpful discussions and training involved strategies for engaging with ELL writers, an area of inclusive pedagogy with which I was less familiar. Our group discussion of Matsuda and Cox's "Reading an ESL Writer's Text" was particularly useful. It helped me both to define and sharpen effective strategies that I already used in the context of ELL writing and to redirect strategies that were ineffective or based on what Matsuda and Cox call the "assimilationist stance" (43). After reading the Matsuda and Cox article, for example, I began reading ELL writers' drafts out loud myself rather than asking the writer to read it, allowing the writer to take note of where I struggled to follow the syntax of the text without the pressure of reading out loud in a second language.

Carol Severino's chapter, "Avoiding Appropriation," brought up different concerns: what if an ELL writer *wants* to learn "the most correct English"? (55). In this context, how should a tutor approach an ELL writer's text without appropriating their style and without conveying normative judgments about "correct" writing? Unlike in my own classroom, where I give students broad feedback on grammar but emphasize that grammar will not be part of their final grade, my role as a tutor involves little control over the classroom expectations, the grading process, or the admissions standards for fellowships and graduate school applications. Several ELL writers began their appointments by expressing concern that they were not meeting the unspoken standards for academic English set by their instructor. In these cases, I used an adapted version of Severino's ten-step program. In order to avoid appropriating the student's writing, I focused on higher-order concerns, explaining to the tutee what the relevant "language norm" involved, why it was relevant, and when it might *not* be appropriate to use. Throughout the appointment, I moved successively through escalating independence: first giving the student several options for revising a sentence and encouraging them to pick one, then asking the student to identify a sentence that stuck out to *them* as challenging or frustrating, and finally asking the student to identify and rephrase a sentence independently. Like teaching in a classroom setting, this worked best for me when I involved the writer collaboratively and transparently in my pedagogical strategies, explaining my reasoning behind each step and asking the student to share particular skills they wanted to build throughout the appointment. Ultimately, our conversations and trainings about inclusive tutoring have not only helped me grow as a tutor; they have also shaped my approach to inclusive pedagogy as an instructor. I hope as we move forward, we can expand our toolset by discussing best practices for students with disabilities and/or other accommodation needs, and I am excited to continue developing inclusive tutoring strategies with my colleagues in our program.

Expanding Students' Access

In addition to these training efforts, we adjusted program logistics to better cater to inclusivity, specifically by augmenting the various ways students can access our program. Thinking of recommendations that communication centers "create multiple points of access and opportunities to request access; access that is collaborative, intimate, and interdependent," and make access a culture, we have leaned in to experimentation, auditioning many ideas with many

campus partners and adapting as needed to discover the best avenues to expand access to our programs (Rinaldi and Spiegel, 2023, p. 20; Konrad, 2016; Daniels et. al., 2015, p. 21).

First, we resumed a regular "Drop-In Hour" where students could bring projects on a first-come, first-serve basis with no need to register or plan ahead. Although our program had featured drop-in support before, we had phased it out during early COVID. We re-started this programming to enable our students to receive support in a more casual, convenient format. Additionally, in rebooting the Drop-In, we considered the old real estate maxim—which might now double as an accessibility maxim—*location, location, location*. Typically, our tutoring programs all occur on the 5th floor of a beautiful, ADA-compliant building. To boost our visibility and approachability, we secured a different room for our regular Drop-In Hour, one on the building's first floor which is filled with natural light and easy to spot. But we knew we could go further to (literally!) meet students where they are. We therefore sought out collaborations to take our "Drop-Ins" on the road for various "Pop-Ups" throughout the semester and university. We hosted "Pop-Ups" in the library, in a central academic building and in our first-generation student center. Each partnership has required an experimental mindset; rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, our team has made our greatest strides when we took risks and tried out different ideas, even when we thought we had the answer.

For example, for our first "Drop-In Pop-Up" in the library, we selected a student-favorite table in an area designated for conversation. But over several shifts, only one student came—a data point that could have led us to discontinue this offering, assuming it wasn't of interest. Instead, we tried again. We moved the "Pop-Up" into a peaceful room with a view of the river—but also had little attendance. We speculated that students typically stayed so quiet in this space that no one wanted to strike up a conversation with a tutor. So, we kept trying and, this time, struck gold: we chose a space across from the printers, next to the highest-traffic hallway. Because there was no table there, it had not occurred to us as a "Pop-Up" location, until a colleague, Kristina, played around with the existing furniture. We added a table and signage and, suddenly, our tutors began averaging multiple conversations in each "Pop-Up." Our openness to attune ourselves to the lived needs of the space and students meant we were able to find a system that worked—not just one that seemed like it *should* work.

Second, mindful of "access fatigue," wherein students who benefit from accommodations become burdened with additional work to receive those accommodations, we updated our tutoring platform so that when students make an appointment, they have the option to respond to the question "Do you have any access needs that you want your Writing Fellow to know about?" Students may now choose to share an access need without the added steps of tracking down our email, drafting a message and handling any back-and-forth. Moreover, students do not need to secure or submit any documentation, nor disclose any diagnosis. This slight change represents only a small way to reduce the burden—one that often contributes to students feeling unwelcome, or at least uncertain, in an institution. And yet, "by adding this point of access for every session," our program fashions a little more room for students to "articulate their [learning] preferences" while also reminding tutors "to approach each session with flexibility,

responsiveness, and openness" so they can respond to students' unique needs (Rinaldi and Spiegel, 2023, pp. 19-20; see also Daniels, et. al., 2020). On a similar level, we updated the language on our website to direct students to "Schedule an Appointment," after receiving feedback from ELL students that they did not know what the word "book" means in the context of "Book an Appointment." Sure, ELL students will likely learn this use-case, but it benefited no one to leave this obstacle in place, so it was worth it to make the tweak and thereby make our programming just a little easier to access. Communication centers are vividly aware that minute revisions can have a major impact on someone's ability to understand material—the difference between passive and active voice comes to mind!—and the same has been true in access. In addition to gleaning the value of an experimental mindset, we have also garnered that even such incremental changes can still be instrumental in enhancing our programs' ability to include our community.

Another incremental but instrumental change revolves around our hiring practices. It is essential to recruit *and* support a "workforce that is diverse in terms of race, nationality, linguistic background, and gender as well as academic major" to resist limited notions of who can be an expert in academic communication (Aikens 2019; Cirillo-McCarthy, 2022). As one way to improve our recruitment, we added interview questions to signal to prospective candidates that our team values inclusion. Now, after explaining to interviewees that, "we work with all BU community members, which means we see a diverse range of projects and students," we ask (1) "How do you define 'inclusion'? How have you contributed toward building an inclusive environment before?" and (2) "How would you approach working with a student who has brought an assignment in an unfamiliar discipline?" The first question considers diverse student populations; the second question considers diverse student projects. Both prompts create space for applicants to discuss how they conceptualize inclusivity and how it would guide their work. These questions have proven valuable on two fronts: first, the applicants often have perceptive definitions formed from their own experiences that in turn deepen our knowledge and second, applicants realize that inclusion underlies our work. Across these many efforts, we thereby aim to set a tone that we strive toward students' access and inclusion.

Our Next Steps
Like writing and speaking, and like tutoring, inclusivity remains a recursive practice that must remain always-in-process to be transformational (Rinaldi and Spiegel, 2023, p. 20). As we continue to prioritize inclusivity as an ongoing commitment, we continue to pursue additional avenues to make our spaces increasingly accessible to all. Our next steps include working through various checklists designed to apply the lessons of universal design to learning centers' spaces and services (Alden, 2022; Burgstahler, 2018). Additionally, we will continue conversations on inclusivity among our tutors. For one, during this year's tutor orientation, we will return to the 'safe enough space,' as well as discuss the 'contact zone' framing often attributed to communication centers. Additionally, we will have an activity about the concept of "*listening to shelter*," described by Leslie Anglesey and Maureen McBride as a "stance of

openness and engagement" that contributes to an inclusive ethos by welcoming all students (Anglesey and McBride, 2019). To prepare tutors to "listen[] to the writer, not the document," we will review this stance and then read a transcript of an appointment with an eye toward giving a (temporary) home to the student's thinking (Anglesey and McBride, 2019). Developing listening as an agentic action, rather than passive occurrence, will empower the tutors to strengthen this key skill as another vector for inclusion. And, later in the fall, tutors will fill in a chart inspired by Rebecca Day Babcock's "Disabilities in the Writing Center" (Day Babcock 2015). This handout will first introduce Day Babcock's thorough research, which collects decades of accessibility-based tutoring recommendations. Then, the hands-on activity to brainstorm when and how to "do," "offer," or "discuss" each recommendation will engage our tutors in generating ways to maximize accessibility in our appointments. Afterward, we aim to integrate another campus partner—Disability and Access Services—to discuss disability justice more broadly.

To communicate, and to engage in generative conversations about our communications, we must strive toward inclusion: including our own and others' bodily experiences, including our own and others' points-of-view, including anti-oppressive language, including narratives beyond Standard Academic English, including any and all levels of access. As a nexus of relationships— between staff and tutors, tutors and tutees, tutees and professors, tutors and tutees and the project in front of them, the project and its sources, the project and all of the lessons on communication that inform it, and so on—the communication center comprises an ecology that should, and can, be founded on inclusion. Over the last year of effort in this direction, we have found it both possible, and meaningful, to experiment on, collaborate toward and ultimately construct this foundation.

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