

Special Topic Section Introduction: Inclusive Pedagogies

Laura Stengrim
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

In recent years, the *Communication Center Journal* and the communication centers community of scholars and practitioners have responded to shifts in the discipline of Communication toward greater awareness of the historical disparities that shape our work. As scholars and teachers, we began to think more carefully about whose voices we are amplifying and privileging in our research and throughout our classrooms and curricula, understanding some of the numerous ways in which the discipline is built to gatekeep and exclude people of color as well as people's whose identities—and often intersectional identities—are otherwise 'other': LGBTQIA+, international, multilingual, disabled, neurodivergent, and first-generation, to name a few. In communication centers, not only are we deeply aware of efforts to support inclusive pedagogy, but in many cases we are also at their very forefront.

The articles collected in this year's Special Topic section on Inclusive Pedagogy highlight the depth and breadth of how our various centers work with individual students who bring to their sessions diverse, intersectional, and unique needs and identities; how we train, prepare, and provide space for ongoing learning and self-reflection among center staff; how we are positioned as campus leaders and resources for faculty development across academic disciplines; how our conversations and collaborations with our writing center colleagues and others can yield holistic support for students, particularly through principles of Universal Design, culturally relevant pedagogy, and approaches to multilingual writers and speakers; and how we can look ahead to future developments in technology, changing student demographics, and institutional trends.

The articles included in this section respond to a broad call in the field of Communication Center studies to consider inclusive pedagogies across institutional contexts and to explore the many diversities that inform our research and everyday practices. O'Connor and Martin draw on interviews with support professionals and public speaking faculty to consider how communication centers can bridge gaps between disability accommodation and normative delivery assessment practices through individualized support for students as well as institutional leadership and faculty development. Guajardo and Radtke, using a lens that combines writing center and communication center studies, similarly advocate for disability-informed approaches within our centers, including universal design, and ask us to reckon with the ableist assumptions that underlie traditional oral and written communication assessment.

Building on the growing scholarship around inclusivity and language practices in communication centers, Ellis and Sietman offer Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) as a guiding principle and perspective in the work of communication centers, from training consultants to creating an environment that celebrates and reflects various cultures through art, food, and music. Boyd, Hobbs, and Lin offer a co-authored conversation between tutors and

administrators about how an ecology and culture of access and inclusivity emerges and is sustained throughout ongoing study, discussion, and reflection. Ledgerwood and Kennedy consider how to train faculty and communication center staff in a global, online campus to work competently with multilingual students, informed by a linguistic diversity perspective. Each of these articles gives readers theoretical and practical insights to consider as we work with students, train staff, reflect on our values, and envision future paths.

The last set of articles anticipates some key questions and challenges facing communication centers. Kallestinova demonstrates how careful integration of self-guided oral communication practice with AI feedback tools, along with face-to-face and synchronous interactions in consultations, can potentially create a more supportive communication center ecosystem overall. When implemented thoughtfully and ethically, emergent technologies can support inclusive pedagogies in communication centers through accessibility and by adapting to the needs of diverse learners. As student demographics change, Keating and Horn suggest further research about communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety, so that tutors are prepared to work adeptly with speakers who use our centers. Finally, Jacob, McDermott, and May provide for us a cautionary tale about university budget models that undercut disciplinary expertise by consolidating student support resources under the guise of equity and inclusion.

Taken together, we are reminded by the authors in this section of *CCJ* that the work we are doing as communication center scholars and practitioners is important in both moving the needle toward greater inclusivity and affirming our institutional relevance. Readers will find a treasure trove of sources, evidence, ideas, anecdotes, and examples to consider implementing in their own centers via staff training, changes in day-to-day operations, and collaborations with faculty and other units. In this way, we are moving the conversation forward through our unique perspectives as well as shared knowledge.

I thank *CCJ* editors Adria Goldman and Kim Cuny for the opportunity to gather our minds on a topic very meaningful in my professional role and also personal life. More years ago than I care to admit, my own college work-study job as a writing center tutor opened a world that was radically welcoming and provided—for the first time—a true sense of belonging. In quiet conversations with my peers, I observed as they developed their authentic voices, and in turn, I started to find mine. Working in writing centers and communication centers, variously configured, for decades at this point, over and over I see how we empower one another by listening with deep care to the diverse stories, experiences, and identities that writers and speakers bring to the table. Many thanks to the students and student workers I've had the pleasure to work with, and especially to the graduate TAs at the University of Illinois who provided editorial and technical assistance in compiling the essays for this volume.