3 FOREWARD

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE CULTURAL BIAS IN STANDARDIZED TESTS
Cori M. Bazemore-James, Thitapa Shinaprayoon, & Jillian Martin

High stakes standardized tests are typically required for admittance, midpoint, and exit exams in higher education even though it has been proven that these tests unfairly stereotype minoritized students. In this paper, we will discuss fairness and cultural bias in standardized testing and ways test developers attempt to control for it. Until more fair alternative solutions are offered, we provide implications for higher education institutions in recruiting, admitting, and supporting students who may experience cultural test bias.

4 WHEN LEADERSHIP FAILS: NAVIGATING BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE BY CRAFTING COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT
James D. Breslin, Ali Cicerch, & Anna Sharpe

While our profession purports to both study and practice effective leadership, we too often hear tales of leadership gone awry. The experiences of practitioners who encounter workplace bullying, inappropriate behavior, and unreasonable demands from leaders on campus are often shrouded in shame and fear. The intent of this article is to bring the realities of workplace bullying in higher education and its impacts to light through narrative and critical analysis, and ultimately to share strategies for navigating these negative experiences. The authors hope this work will provide an entry point for current and incoming professionals to make sense of failed leadership and serve as a signpost that engaging in vulnerability provides a way forward.

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Shamika Karikari

“Nobody told me” is an authentic reflection of being a Black woman trying to pursue a doctoral degree. I chronicle the unspoken rules of what it takes to persist in the wake of insecurity, loneliness and racism. I share my story in hopes that other Black women know they’re not alone in this journey.

14 STUDENT VOICES: INFORMING OUR PRACTICE
Martha E. Casazza & Sharon L. Silverman

Using a qualitative grounded theory design, the researchers sought to identify the factors that contribute to college success for students who have overcome significant barriers as they strive to complete their education. Data analysis from the interviews led to the development of an integrated model for practice. The most significant factor in the students’ success was having someone demonstrate a strong belief in them.
LOOKING AT THE WRITING CENTER THROUGH COYOTE’S EYES
Jennie Wellman

Many writing centers function from lenses established by Aristotle and Plato as a means of production and understanding. Often, these lenses contributed to a binary making it difficult to break away from a dichotomous view of writing center theory and functionality. This essay explores opportunities for gaining new perspectives on how to become better anti-racist, anti-xenophobic, and anti-homophobic accomplices as staff members of campus writing centers. Situated within the Navajo trickster tale of How Coyote Lost His Eyes, this narrative examines the very theoretical lenses operationalized in writing center theory to unearth underlying assumptions that might be lost.

MANAGING YOUR FIRST 365: START WITH THE CAS STANDARDS
Melissa Thomas

The use of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Self-Assessment Guides and the Learning Assistance Program Standards and Guidelines was essential to negotiating my first year as the director of a learning center. This article describes how preparing for, conducting, and responding to the results of a CAS self-assessment can shape a new director’s leadership in the first months.
The role of academic support remains a contested issue in student affairs. As members of the Commission for Academic Support in Higher Education, rather than debate the merits of our work, we seek to instead: highlight the interdisciplinary nature of academic support, identify and emphasize ways in which leadership failures and office dynamics can inadvertently minimize campus impact and thus student success, and illuminate the ways in which student feedback must remain at the core of our assessment and reflection practices. This monograph stands as a contribution to the literary canon surrounding best practices in academic support.

Students report enduring higher education as a singular experience. Accordingly, we seek to use this monograph as a means of bridging together the seeming divide between the curricular and co-curricular. To underscore the ways in which employment issues and student issues are together part of a larger culture of higher education rather than separate entities. Moreover, we recognize the changing landscape of the college environment due to the growing number of first generation college students and increasing age of current students. For these reasons, we position academic support as a functional area that can see to and through student development, personal development, and retention by ensuring students are able to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally when the totality of these needs and their intersections are met.

This monograph includes a snippet of research detailing the interdisciplinary nature of academic support. From issues of testing bias to reflections on the doctoral student journey in a students’ own words, this monograph positions academic support at the crux of student learning and development. We recognize that our students perform best, personally and professionally, when they accomplish their goals in the classroom. Many of the strategies and reflections in this monograph provide a roadmap for better supporting and advocating for students throughout their academic career.

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Imagine the day you first took your college entrance exam, perhaps the SAT or ACT. Picture yourself as a teenager walking into the exam room and finding your seat with your number 2 pencils and scratch paper in hand. You are nervous, perhaps it is early in the morning so you are still waking up, and there is a chill in the room from the air conditioner. Your heart is pumping because you know the stakes are so high to get into the college of your dreams and you should have spent more time studying. Now imagine looking at all of the other test takers in the room and noticing that no one else looks like you. Your skin color does not match that of the exam proctors either. Now you are unsure if the proctor gave you that stern look because they too are tired or because they do not think you belong there. Suddenly, you feel out of place and not good enough, because somewhere in the back of your mind you believe that people of your skin color are not good at math and are lucky just to get into the local community college. “Time starts now,” the proctor says as your hands tremble and you begin the first exam question.

Depending on the messages that one grows up with about their cultural group they may experience high stakes testing situations differently, resulting in varying levels of performance. In this paper, we discuss the high stakes situations of taking standardized tests in multiple stages of a student’s educational career. First, we introduce relevant concepts that factor into cultural bias in standardized testing. Next, we review statistical procedures that test developers have used to detect and minimize test bias. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of implications for student affairs practice.

**CULTURAL BIAS IN STANDARDIZED TESTS**

Standardized tests are those “in which the questions, the scoring procedures, and the interpretation of results are consistent and which are administered and scored in a manner allowing comparisons to be made across individuals and groups” (Benjamin, Miller, Rhodes, Banta, Pike, & Davies, 2012, p. 7). They are implemented throughout a student’s educational career purportedly to assess generic knowledge and skills, quality of faculty teaching, and student learning (Benjamin et al, 2012; Brunn-Bevel & Byrd, 2015). Admissions counselors, academic and/or testing support services, and employers then make predictions of student’s future success based on a myriad of
standardized tests (e.g., IQ tests, statewide tests, college and graduate program entrance and exit exams, job aptitude tests, etc.; McMahon, 2015). Because the predictions from these test scores have a massive impact on students’ lives, test developers should minimize any bias and measurement error in standardized tests. Test evaluators determine if and where students are accepted into college and graduate school, whether they must take remedial courses, whether they can remain in or complete current higher education programs, and if and where they will be hired post-graduation.

While an ongoing debate ensues as to whether standardized tests are adequate in making these predictions, there is also an issue of varying subgroup (e.g., groups based on race/ethnicity, culture, language, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) mean scores (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999). In this paper, we focus on a particular discrepancy in test outcomes that occurs based on ethnic/racial group membership. For instance, African Americans tend to score one whole standard deviation below Caucasian Americans on standardized cognitive ability tests (Aiken, 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 2001; Rushton & Jensen, 2005). In fact, there is a historical rank order of performance on IQ tests based on racial group membership, in which Asian Americans score the highest at about 3 points above Caucasian Americans, who then score approximately 15 points above African Americans, while Latinos and Native Americans typically fall somewhere in between Caucasian and African Americans (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2001). This discrepancy between test scores are attributed to construct irrelevant factors such as racial group membership (Beutler, Brown, Crothers, Booker, & Seabrook, 1996; Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005). This could also indicate that unfairness not only affects the individuals in the lower scoring group but also “that at least some individuals in the higher scoring group benefit from whatever unfairness potentially underlies the racial-group mean differences” (Helms, 2006).

The difference in racial subgroup mean scores mimics the intended outcomes of the original standardized IQ tests, with exception to Asian Americans. Such tests were invented in the 1910s to demonstrate the superiority of rich, U.S.-born, White men of northern European descent over non-Whites and recent immigrants (Gersh, 1987). By developing an exclusion-inclusion criteria that favored the aforementioned groups, test developers created a norm “intelligent” (Gersh, 1987, p. 166) population “to differentiate subjects of known superiority from subjects of known inferiority” (Terman, 1922, p. 656).

While such blatant racism is less common today, a problematic outcome exists: Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism is “a perceptual set in which European and/or European American values, customs, traditions and characteristics are used as exclusive standards against which people and events in the world are evaluated and perceived” (Helms, 1989, p. 643). Although psychometricians are aware of possible cultural biases, tests overwhelming favor a Eurocentric cultural way of thinking. White psychometricians, who have been interpersonally and professionally socialized in Eurocentric environments, have created the cognitive ability tests and standardized them on similarly socialized White samples (Helms, 1992). Therefore, such tests would give differential favoritism to Whites and other groups who naturally use or can develop a similar style of thinking (Scarr, 1988). This advantage would not occur because Whites are more intelligent than other groups, but because they created an artificial inflation in their favor and a devaluing of the intelligence of other culturally based ideologies (Helms, 1992, 2006; Prilleltensky, 1989). A rigid adherence to this practice in testing “adversely impacts the groups for whom the norm is foreign… [and] it potentially deprives society of the kinds of diversity in intellectual functioning that might lead to a better society” (Helms, 1992, p. 1091).

Although it is true that psychometricians have procedures to minimize test bias, these procedures may not screen out biased items if test developers use samples that do not reflect culturally diverse groups. For example, say test developers use a mostly Western culture sample to measure job performance in which they remove items that are biased against the majority of test takers in the sample. So while biased items have been removed, how applicable could this test be for measuring job performance in Eastern cultures? Items that contain cultural knowledge or norms may not be
generalizable across cultures.

Therefore, careful review of test fairness is of great importance. Definitions of test fairness generally include giving all test-takers, no matter their group memberships, the exact same test and testing procedure, except for in cases of physical or learning disabilities in which the test-taker can be given reasonable accommodations to ensure equity in the testing process (AERA et al., 1999; Camilli, 2013; Kane, 2010). Testing conditions and content should also be free of stereotyping, culturally offensive material, and other negative implications to ensure that a test measures what it is intended to measure (i.e., content validity) across different racial groups (Camilli, 2013). Thus, Camilli (2013) called for the use of a sensitivity review of new testing programs to avoid statistical bias and faulty interpretation of test scores from the accidental usage of cultural insensitivity. He also suggested that tests should include multiple types of measurement to insure fairness. In the case of classroom assessment, he proposed that testers consider “the strength of the link between assessment and instruction, opportunity to learn, sensitivity of assessment procedures to cultural and religious differences, and the use of multiple measures” (p. 116).

Regardless of attempts to minimize test bias, item bias often takes place. Item bias occurs when some unintended characteristic of a test item gives an unfair advantage to one subgroup of examinees over another (Clauser & Mazor, 1998). Culturally biased test items “have characteristics that are unrelated to the achievement construct being measured but are sensitive for particular cultural groups and affect their performance” (Banks, 2006, p. 115). For example, this occurs when members of racial subgroups interpret response options on a multiple choice test in different ways than anticipated by the test developers (Health, 1989; Veale et al., 1983). An investigation into the fairness of a test would be for the purpose of “sort[ing] out whether the reasons for group differences are due to factors beyond the scope of the test (such as opportunity to learn or level of achievement) or artificially dependent on testing procedures” (Camilli, 2013, p. 108). In the next section, we review a common statistical approach of evaluating test fairness.

METHODS AND STATISTICAL ANALYSES FOR TEST FAIRNESS

To study cultural fairness in standardized testing, item response theory (IRT) allows researchers to examine whether test items measure the underlying trait, or true performance (Camilli, 2013; Penfield & Camilli, 2007). In IRT, differential item functioning (DIF) is an analysis that assumes the same underlying trait and ability among test takers. If test scores differ from extraneous variables (e.g., race, culture, socioeconomic status, etc.) other than the ability that was intended to be measured, the tests are biased. DIF is often used to determine test fairness and can reveal a significant difference of success rates (i.e., the probability that members from different groups answer an item with different success rates) between subgroups (Camilli, 2013; Clauser et al, 1998).

Although DIF can detect a cultural bias, it does not always necessarily indicate a biased test. DIF also allows test developers to identify the biased order of test items (e.g., Çokluk, Gül, & Doğan-Gül, 2016), or the difficulty of items. It is often beneficial to use difficult items to differentiate between people who understand the materials at a deeper level from people who do not. In other words, DIF can occur if the different success rates indicate that people who deeply understand the materials correctly answer difficult items while people who superficially understand the materials incorrectly answer difficult items. However, items are biased if people with the same ability, but from different racial or cultural backgrounds, answer test items at different success rates because it may indicate that the test does not necessarily measure the true ability or performance. Thus, it is necessary for a diverse group of experts to review these items with DIF to ensure the cultural fairness of the test (Camilli, 2013; Clauser et al, 1998; Huang & Han, 2012; Penfield et al, 2007; Perrone, 2006).

Regardless of expert reviews in test development, various tests still show cultural bias. For example, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) was created to screen patients with depression, regardless of culture, language, and gender. However, the BDI showed different responses when it was translated from English...
to Spanish. Spanish speakers tended to agree or disagree more strongly to some items than English speakers because of cultural differences (Kerr & Kerr Jr., 2001). A translation can cause the test bias by changing the meaning of words or phrases (Huang et al, 2012).

The SAT also contains culturally biased questions in the verbal section, in particular for sentence completion and reading comprehension sections. Empirical studies have shown that African American and Latino examinees performed better on the sentence completion and reading comprehension sections than Caucasian examinees if the questions contained content relating to their minoritized cultures (Carlton & Harris, 1992; Schmitt & Dorans, 1990). Other research has also showed that African American examinees generally performed worse on difficult verbal and math questions, but performed better on easy verbal and math questions in comparison to Caucasian examinees. This difference in performance may be due to different interpretation of words based on culture and also socioeconomic status (Freedle, 2003). On the contrary, some researchers argued that this cultural bias was found on SAT questions that were used before the ETS implemented their DIF screening procedure to detect any biased SAT questions. Moreover, these researchers argued that the cultural bias was found with a weaker DIF method (Dorans, 2004; Dorans & Zeller, 2004).

To resolve the criticisms toward the previous cultural bias on the SAT, however, a more recent study demonstrated that some cultural bias still occurred even after the use of a stronger DIF statistical method and the use of SAT questions that had been screened by the ETS’s DIF screening procedure (Santelices & Wilson, 2010). It was found that Latino and Caucasian test takers performed similarly on the verbal and math tests, and African American and Caucasian test takers performed similarly on the math test. However, African Americans performed better on hard verbal questions, but worse on easy verbal questions in comparison to Caucasians (Santelices et al, 2010). Similar effects of DIF on hard and easy questions are not limited to SAT and GRE, but have also appeared on other tests, such as the Civic Education Study (CES) which assesses basic knowledge about the U.S. government and Constitution (Scherbaum & Goldstein, 2008). In response to varying performances among subgroups in standardized tests, test developers can utilize some strategies to reduce the subgroup difference without compromising the test validity. The next section discusses the strategies to reduce the subgroup difference and the implications.

**DISCUSSION**

Cultural bias in standardized testing is an important consideration for access and equity in higher education. By effectively predicting students’ educational pathways, these tests affect the social mobility and individual agency for students. By continuing to use testing that is culturally biased, institutions perpetuate inequity in education as these tests remain a barrier for students accessing higher education. We argue that higher education administrators have a moral obligation to adjust their dependence on testing in admissions and placement decisions in their efforts to ensure inclusive excellence (Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005). Student affairs practitioners are uniquely situated to be advocates for these considerations in culturally biased tests in their expertise on students in higher education and whose core competencies include holistic development, student learning, and social justice (ACPA, 1994; ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

Additionally, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) is “the pre-eminent force for promoting standards in student affairs, student services, and student development programs” (About CAS, 2016). CAS is made up of member associations that are part of higher education broadly, and depending on the institution, divisions of student affairs specifically ensure student development and learning through standards of practice for 45 functional areas. In 2014, CAS included the National College Testing Association (NCTA) and National College Learning Center Association (NCLC) in its member associations and included standards of practice for practitioners working in these areas in its ninth edition (CAS Staff, 2014; CAS, 2015). CAS recognizes testing and academic support services as critical to institutional operations in higher education. As such, higher education professionals should be aware of cultural
bias in standardized testing and implement policies and services for affected students. To this aim, we discuss several implications for practice in higher education and student affairs to understanding and addressing the effects of cultural bias in standardized testing.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

Central to each of these implications for practice is the acknowledgement that cultural bias is present in standardized testing and creates vulnerability for racially minoritized populations (Stewart & Haynes, 2015; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This vulnerability happens when an individual’s “performance suffers when the situation redirects attention needed to perform a task onto some other concern -- in the case of stereotype threat, a concern with the significance of one’s performance in light of a devaluing stereotype” (Steele et al, 1995, p. 798). As a result, some racially minoritized populations are disadvantaged by standardized testing relative to their Caucasian counterparts in the exact same setting before test administration (Helms, 2006; Steele et al, 1995).

For higher education, there are three important implications for practice that should be considered: professional learning opportunities for administrators regarding cultural bias, consideration of weights and controls for cultural bias in admissions and placement decisions, and implementation of programming to address stereotype threat and provide additional support for affected populations of cultural bias.

Professional learning opportunities about cultural bias. Institutions should provide professional development and learning opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators that educate about the effects of cultural bias in standardized testing. These professional learning opportunities should be focused on the history of standardized testing, controversies over their use in college admissions and post-graduation decisions, the negative effect of cultural bias in standardized testing for minority students, and how institutions can consider alternatives to standardized testing to control for cultural bias. Further, these opportunities encourage collaborations between divisions of student affairs, offices of human resources, and centers for teaching and learning to create institutional-specific solutions in the place of standardized testing in admissions decisions.

Admissions and placement decisions: Weights and controls. Some higher education institutions have begun to place less weight on standardized testing in their admissions decisions (i.e. Hampshire College, New York University, etc.; Sanchez, 2015). As discussed above, differential item functioning (DIF) is a statistical tool that enhance the understanding of fairness bias. Further, Stewart and Haynes (2015) encouraged the use of collaborative efforts between students, teachers, and administrators in primary and secondary schools that focused on critical multicultural education. This focus creates a holistic view of education that can be transferred into higher education and used in consideration of admissions decisions.

While controversial, race-conscious admissions policies are attempts by universities to ameliorate the effects of historical oppression and underrepresentation of racially minoritized populations in higher education (Stulberg & Chen, 2013). This has led to several court cases regarding the extent to which race can be considered as part of admissions decisions (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003; Fisher v. The University of Texas at Austin, 2016). Similarly, higher education administrators, particularly those who develop admissions decision policies, should implore weights and controls in consideration of standardized testing in admissions decisions. These weights and controls are particularly important for minoritized populations by both race and class. By de-emphasizing standardized testing in higher education admission decisions, institutions can send a message to test developers about the need to reduce cultural bias in standardized tests and create more equitable testing procedures.

Programming and support services. In addition to the above measures, education professionals should ensure that campus-wide programming and support services are available to students who may be adversely affected by cultural bias in standardized testing. By implementing programming throughout the educational pipeline, students are better able to cope with the negative effects of stereotype threat and cultural bias they experience. In addition to programming, support services should be part of the student’s’ educational career.
Implications for Workplace

Similar strategies from student affairs practice to reduce the cultural bias are also applicable to the workplace context. For instance, employers can include other measures such as personality test, interpersonal skills, motivation, and experience that may be good indicators of the true performance, instead of relying only on the standardized testing. Moreover, coaching and training programs (e.g., tutoring, mock interviews, workshops) can increase employees’ familiarity with job seeking procedures (Sackett, Schmitt, Ellingson, & Kabin, 2001).

CONCLUSION

Cultural bias is an ongoing concern in standardized tests, which students must encounter throughout their educational careers. Perhaps the ultimate goal is to find alternative ways to assess student abilities and future performance. In the meantime, as discussed in this paper, there are many ways in which student affairs professionals and institutions of higher education can work to alleviate the problem and support students to create more equitable opportunities.

REFERENCES


**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES**

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Nobody told me that it would be lonely.  
That the emptiness would drown me like Cheerios being overtaken by the 2% milk in my morning cereal.  
That I wouldn’t be able to find the words to articulate why I felt so alone.  
That being in a cohort didn’t make a difference because sometimes I feel the loneliness even when I’m in a room full of people.  
See, loneliness isn’t a feeling of people being near, but a condition of the soul.

Nobody told me we’d pretend all the time.  
Wearing a mask would become the norm.  
Being on this journey with so many others and knowing they might have some of the same feelings,  
But we don’t talk about the struggle.  
We ignore the elephant in the room.  
Instead of calling it out, we smile, bat our eyes, and go about business as usual.  
I’m still holding on to the hope that one day someone will see me in my struggle, like really see me.

Nobody told me my Blackness would continue to be center stage.  
And not like “here’s Mika Karikari, leading actress, who’s starring in this doctoral film.  
Instead, it’s “here’s Mika Karikari,  
Rehearsing a script I didn’t write,  
Continue to face the plight,  
Of being Black in the academy that wasn’t created for me.  
The reminder that completing my Ph.D. means nothing to the folks that still think my Blackness disqualifies me for this journey.

Nobody told me that instead of being called an angry Black woman,  
I’d be referred to as being “fired up”,  
As if I don’t know what that really means.  
That my passion would be policed,

My voice would be ceased,  
Whenever I spoke with conviction.
Nobody told me imposter syndrome was real.
Like as real as the brown skin on my body.
That it would be imbedded into every step I took,
Printed in every word in the books
That didn’t speak to my experience.

Nobody told me how hard it would be.
That there would be moments I’d want to quit,
That I’d have to hold on to my faith to make it another day.

Nobody told me the “I’m not good enough” label would be tattooed in my mind.
That the journey would bring up more questions than answers about my place in the academy.
That doubt would cripple my heart,
And tear me apart,
In ways that left me in despair.

Nobody told me.
So I commit to share my voice,
So you can have a glimpse into the heart,
Of a sister trying to make a start,
Through the academy that was not created for us.

*Nobody told me.*

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

**Shamika Karikari** is an educator committed to racial justice. She is dedicated to empowering others to use their voice to bring change to the spaces they occupy. Shamika’s extensive work in residence life, academic support, and orientation provided her with opportunities to serve students and support them during their collegiate experience. Shamika is currently a doctoral student in the Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) program at Miami University and doctoral associate for Career Services. She received her B.A. in History from Bowling Green State University and M.S. in SAHE from Miami University.
Using a qualitative research design, we conducted a study to identify the factors contributing to college success for students who have overcome identifiable barriers as they strive to complete their education. Those barriers may include inadequate academic preparation, lack of financial support, misconceptions about college, and being a first generation student among others. We held interviews across three countries (United States, Canada and South Africa) through skype with 15 students who overcame significant barriers to reach their educational goals. Data analysis from the interviews led to the development of an integrated model for practice. The most significant factor in the students’ success was having someone demonstrate a strong belief in them.

The most significant factor in the students’ success is shown at the core and is having someone demonstrate a strong belief in them. This strong belief correlated with several personal attributes that emerged from the interviews. The researchers categorized these attributes as persistence, self-efficacy and emotional awareness. While these individual attributes have been linked to student success in prior studies, the model described here emphasizes the importance of their integration and how practitioners can facilitate the development of this dynamic as they work with students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Persistence

The data analysis showed that the participants all shared a set of common attitudes. This set included grit, resilience, and a growth mindset, all closely related and with overlapping dimensions. We labeled these attitudes “persistence.”

Grit

Grit has been defined as a personality trait where one has a “tendency to pursue long-term goals with sustained zeal and hard work” (Von Culin, Tsukayama & Duckworth, 2014). It is related to stamina and the ability to overcome short-term failures or obstacles in order to continue working toward a long-term goal. Research indicates that grit can predict achievement in academic, vocational and avocational domains. High school juniors in Chicago with a high degree of grit were more likely to graduate on time than their peers who displayed less grit (Eskreis-Winkler, Duckworth, Shulman and Beale, 2014).

Resilience

Resilience is closely related to the concept of grit but is most useful when considered not as a fixed trait but “from a process of repeated interactions between a person and favorable features of the surrounding context in a person’s life” (Gilligan, 2004, p 94). Research indicates that especially in young people, resilience is “highly dependent on other people and multiple systems of influence” (O’Dougherty, Wright, Masten and Narayan, 2013, p. 31). Once it was considered to be an innate characteristic, but today it is considered a developmental process dependent on the interactions between individuals and their environment. Some researchers (Benard, 1995, Masten, 2001) suggest that everyone has the capacity for “self-righting.” Masten refers to it as “ordinary magic” where most individuals who face adversity are able to arrive at “normative” outcomes.
Growth Mindset

Research indicates the concept of mindset to be a reliable predictor of academic performance. Dweck (2006) describes two types of mindset. The first is fixed. Individuals with a fixed mindset believe they have been endowed with an intelligence that does not change over time. They believe that no amount of effort will change what they consider to be innate. The second type is a growth mindset. Those with a growth mindset believe that their behavior can impact their intelligence and ability to achieve. They see intelligence as evolving over time through their efforts and strategic behavior.

Each of the participants in our study displayed a growth mindset. The final component of the interview protocol asked each student to respond to the following four statements taken from Dweck (p. 12):

- Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.
- You can learn new things, but you can’t really change how intelligent you are.
- No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.
- You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.

One hundred percent of the participants responded in the affirmative to the last statement. Not one of them demonstrated a tendency toward a fixed mindset. Their comments included the following-- “You can change. It’s like a plant; as long as you’re feeding it, it’s going to grow.” “As you learn something, you become more intelligent.”

SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy is one’s belief in the likelihood of successfully completing a task (Bandura, 1977). It is the belief that one’s actions will affect change. These beliefs are critical to overcoming challenges and succeeding academically.

Albert Bandura’s research asserts that self-efficacy is the major determinant of effort, persistence, and goal setting. According to Bandura (1982), there are four determinants of self-efficacy beliefs: personal experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal messages and social persuasion and physiological states.

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

Emotions contribute to learning in many ways. They affect one’s ability to remain focused and process information, and they can advance or impede learning success. The research on emotions and emotional intelligence lays a foundation for understanding why some students succeed and others do not. The terms emotional intelligence and emotional awareness are used interchangeably in this study.

The literature on emotional intelligence provides insight into understanding the individuals we interviewed. The term “emotional intelligence,” first used by Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990), refers to the ability to manage feelings and relationships. According to Daniel Goleman (1995) emotional intelligence involves self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills. These are central components of emotional awareness.

Self-aware individuals are able to read and understand emotions and recognize their impact on performance. In addition, self-aware persons have realistic evaluations of their strengths and weaknesses. The ability to control disruptive emotions and impulses and consistently display honesty and integrity are hallmarks of the next component, self-management. Self-management is also characterized by successfully meeting responsibilities, adapting to changing situations, overcoming obstacles and initiative along with a drive to meet an internal standard of excellence.

The socially-aware individual is empathic and senses others’ emotions while taking an interest in their concerns. In addition, being socially aware involves building networks and relationships. Social awareness leads to the development of social skills including effective communication, conflict management, teamwork and collaboration, and the drive to help others. Many of the students in this study expressed the desire to help others and did so through tutoring and mentoring activities.

Adjusting to changes and overcoming obstacles is critical to the development of emotional intelligence. The individuals in this study all displayed an ability to adapt and adjust so their challenges ultimately became opportunities. The connection between emotional
intelligence and learning success is evident throughout this study. Building bonds and cultivating and maintaining relationships is particularly present. All of the students developed and maintained relationships with significant others who recognized their potential and supported them to succeed. These helpers set boundaries within a supportive environment, had high expectations of the students, provided validation of their accomplishments and helped influence positive emotions leading to success.

One of the key components of emotional intelligence is a social skill that includes the drive to help and develop others. The students in this study evidenced this most effectively as they continued past graduation to pursue experiences in teaching and the helping professions.

Since the subjects of this study were all in higher education, it is helpful to look at theories that help describe this population. Emotional awareness is closely tied to the classic theory of Arthur Chickering (1993) whose theory of student development proposed seven vectors of development. The vectors include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Chickering’s work is principally useful in this study as it centers on the psychosocial development of college age students.

The vectors or paths to development are characterized by both degree (strong to mild) and direction (positive or negative). Of the seven vectors, managing emotions is particularly relevant here. Positively managing emotions involves recognizing and accepting them and appropriately expressing and controlling them. The students in this study evidenced this competence as they acknowledged their fears and anxieties and sought resources to address them.

Chickering’s student development theory helps explain the success of these students and underscores the importance of identifying emotional awareness as an important ingredient in the “Believe in You” model.

**PRINCIPLES FOR PRACTICE**

Based on our findings, we offer five principles for practice. For each principle, we suggest strategies that can facilitate their implementation. Although we link the strategies to specific principles for the sake of clarity, the student interviews indicate that they are meaningful as part of a whole rather than as discrete approaches. The data suggest that we view them holistically and integrate them across our practice.

1. **Facilitate a growth mindset for each student**

   What can we do as practitioners to encourage a growth mindset approach? First, we can address the concept of mindset directly with our students. By asking students to respond to the four questions that we asked our interviewees, we are making them aware of the differences. Once they are aware of their own self-beliefs, we can facilitate a discussion around the probable outcomes of the two approaches. By providing examples from our own experiences and also asking other students to share theirs, we can help those with a fixed mindset to reflect and begin to revise their thinking.

   Secondly, we can provide feedback that encourages persistence and practice. Based on Dweck’s work (2006), we should avoid complimenting students for their intelligence or native ability. This confirms for them that intelligence is fixed and that if they do not have the innate ability, there is little they can do. We need to find ways to assign value to persistence and practice. We can encourage students to persist in their efforts by requiring drafts of projects. For instance, for a first draft we do not assign a grade; rather, we provide comments based on the strengths we find in the work and tell them to continue with a second draft. Once they are ready to submit the final project, we can help them see their improvement and understand that it was the result of hard work, not innate ability.

   Third and closely related to the previous strategy, we need to gain the trust of our students through our comments on their work. It is easy to be judgmental when grading papers, but that can contribute to an already fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006). By limiting comments to overall patterns, not each discrete error, and finding strengths throughout a paper we demonstrate that we are not judging; rather, we are working along with them to make it better.
2. Create an emotionally-supportive environment

Creating an emotionally-supportive environment involves a number of very specific, intentional strategies. First among them is being sure to affirm the accomplishments of students without emphasizing competition. Competition can lead to situations where students hesitate to participate. Emotionally-supportive learning environments involve positive interactions that include respect, empathy, and the encouragement for learning without fear of humiliation. Students in emotionally-supportive environments are more likely to be comfortable taking risks without fear of ridicule or embarrassment.

Focused and detailed positive feedback for well-deserved achievements is a critical component for creating emotionally-supportive environments. High expectations along with support and encouragement in noncompetitive ways promote learning success. Learning situations that emphasize self-awareness are emotionally supportive. Modeling self-reflection and self-awareness is one way to help students become more self-aware, identify their feelings, and gain control over negative thoughts. Discussing both positive and negative feelings helps students become more comfortable in challenging situations so they can use positive thoughts to overcome difficulties.

Promoting honesty and integrity is essential in an emotionally-supportive environment. Explicitly sharing guidelines and expectations is important as is agreement on consequences for lack of integrity. Examples of dishonesty and integrity failures can be helpful to further explain this aspect of an emotionally-supportive environment. Listening actively and communicating in a clear and unambiguous manner is essential. Opportunities to be heard in a non-judgmental way are less threatening and more conducive to learning success (Bond, 2012).

3. Promote realistic self-efficacy beliefs in each student

Realistic self-efficacy beliefs are developed when students are given choices and not required to rigidly adhere to task requirements. For example, students may be allowed to choose among a set of different assignment due dates or to select from a variety of different ways to complete a requirement. In this way, students gain autonomy leading to self-efficacy in the learning process.

Targeted feedback is feedback that specifically compares current performance to past performance and emphasizes effort and not comparison with others. Frequent and targeted feedback is very helpful in creating realistic self-efficacy beliefs. (Zimmerman and Shrunk, 2013)

The use of peer models is also very effective. When students are faced with a task and view peers successfully performing it, they are more likely to persist. Seeing peers struggle and overcoming obstacles also helps develop realistic self-efficacy beliefs.

Encourage students to try. Give them support by saying, “I know this may seem difficult, but if you proceed in small steps I know you can do it.” “Break up the task into smaller parts, so it won’t seem overwhelming.” These statements go a long way to keeping students motivated with realistic self-efficacy beliefs.

Finally, make the most of students’ interests and tie assignments into them. For example, in a history course, allow students to connect their own family heritage to an era or to research sports as they occurred in that time period. The more interested students are, the more they are likely to persist and have self-efficacy beliefs that lead to successful learning. (Zimmerman and Shrunk, 2013)

4. Develop student grit through alignment of short term and long term goals

One way to begin a discussion with students about grit is to ask them to respond to the “Grit Scale.” This was developed by Duckworth, A.L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M.D., and Kelly, D.R. (2007) and contains 12 items that will prompt self-reflection and discussion. Items include “I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge,” “Setbacks don’t discourage me,” “I become interested in new pursuits every few months.” Once the students have completed it and rated themselves in terms of grittiness, the discussion can begin. This can be one component of a unit on achieving long term goals. Once the students begin sharing their own experiences, it may be helpful to invite others to
the discussion. Alumni of the program, student coaches or staff members can share their own stories. At the conclusion, students can complete an action plan that aligns short term goals with long term goals.

Students become discouraged when a short term goal becomes an obstacle. For instance, if a student wants to become an engineer but fails the first physics course how can we help them overcome this “barrier” without giving up the long term goal? We can certainly recommend working with a tutor or learning center to identify and strengthen the concepts that were particularly challenging. We could also advise the student to take the course at a time when she won’t be taking any other course in order to focus only on physics. These options will cause the student to take additional time to reach the ultimate goal, but may also ensure that she reaches it.

We can help students develop flowcharts that visually show the pathways from short term to long term goals. Flow charts include options if one path doesn’t work; they will need to think about creating alternatives and build them into the chart. By engaging in this activity, they will find themselves forced to create different pathways all leading to the same end.

5. Strengthen protective factors to increase student resiliency

Resiliency theory and research lead us to think about the interaction of the protective factors a student encounters versus the number of risk factors present in the environment. Many of our students come to us with multiple risk factors, so how can we ensure a resiliency-fostering learning environment? What are the protective factors that we can offer?

We heard from all of the students we interviewed that having a close relationship with a teacher or staff member contributed significantly to their successes. These relationships led to their feeling that someone believed in them and held them to high standards.

To facilitate the development of a trusting relationship with students, we recommend making time for them on an individual or small group basis. When we hold office hours at times that are scheduled during student-friendly hours, we increase the likelihood that they will take advantage of them. When they do, it gives us an opportunity to get to know them beyond the classroom. These are the times when we can best provide advice, demonstrate tough love, and let them know that we believe in them. We listen to their individual stories and gain more insight into their backgrounds, personal interests and long term goals. Once we learn about students’ personal interests and goals, we can design assignments that will seem more relevant to them. If we match those to high standards, we can foster their resilience.

We can encourage the formation of peer group interactions by assigning projects that require collaboration and working as a team. If we know something about our students’ backgrounds and interests, we can construct teams that will embrace a supportive and encouraging dynamic based on its members. For example, one of the students we interviewed talked about how important it was for him to get to know others who shared his values and goals. Together, they can motivate each other.

As we get to know our students and create a climate of trust, we must continue to articulate high standards and expectations. Our courses must be rigorous. A significant element of a difficult course is to provide the scaffolding the students need to succeed. The scaffolding can include tutors dedicated to the course, after-class instructional support or online advice as needed. We must tell them multiple times that we believe in them and find the strengths they bring before identifying their weaknesses; they probably already know what they are.

CONCLUSION

Our work has led us to a model for student success based directly on student voices. Their stories clearly demonstrate how important it is to have someone believe in you at a critical time. In addition, there were three significant attributes at the foundation of all the stories: persistence, self-efficacy and emotional awareness. While these individual attributes have been linked to student success in prior studies, the model described here emphasizes their integration and how practitioners can facilitate the development of this dynamic as they work with students.
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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES


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LOOKING AT THE WRITING CENTER THROUGH COYOTE’S EYES

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It is not enough to look through the theoretical lenses we use to think through ways of making and enhancing writing center theory. It leads to assumptions about there being a natural and universal way of thinking about the work we do as tutors as directors as writers. We have long looked through lenses established by Aristotle and Plato; lenses used to produce and understand knowledge. Yet this lens creates a binary and we get stuck in the space of either/or. As a place to start moving beyond the dichotomous, I work towards answering the call made by Victor Villanueva to consider rhetorics outside of the Greco-Roman tradition. Villanueva urges scholars to move toward inhabiting the interstitial to think through new ways of seeing writing praxis. By using the Navajo trickster tale of How Coyote Lost His Eyes, this article explores how we can follow Coyote’s lead, to lose our eyes and gain new perspectives on how to become better anti-racist, anti-xenophobic, and anti-homophobic accomplices. I argue that we must look at the very theoretical lenses themselves that obtain in writing center theory to unearth underlying assumptions that might be lost - or even elided - because these tales are twice told.

COYOTE

One day Coyote found Rabbit in the forest. Coyote watched as Rabbit threw his eyes up into the air where they perched on the highest tree branch. “Come back!” Rabbit commanded his eyes and they returned to Rabbit’s eye sockets. Coyote thought this trick was the best trick, and begged Rabbit to teach him how to throw his eyes. At first Rabbit told Coyote no, but Coyote continued to beg. Rabbit eventually agreed, but warned Coyote that he is cannot throw eyes up more than three times in one day, otherwise something terrible will happen. Rabbit left, and Coyote practiced by throwing his eyes up. “Come back!” Coyote commanded and his eyes came back to his. Twice more Coyote did this until he realized he cannot throw eyes up more than three times in one day, otherwise something terrible will happen. Rabbit left, and Coyote practiced by throwing his eyes up. “Come back!” Coyote commanded and his eyes came back to his. Twice more Coyote did this until he realized he should teach humans in a nearby village his new trick. Coyote went to the village and gathered everyone around. He threw his eyes up into the air, and they perched upon a treetop. “Come back!” Coyote commanded, but his eyes stayed put; looking back at him from the treetop. Just then Raven flew by and ate Coyote’s eyes, mistaking them for berries. Coyote staggered away from the village, humiliated that he had lost his eyes. Just then Mouse came along and found Coyote crying. Coyote told Mouse his story about losing his eyes, and Mouse consoled Coyote by giving him one of his eyes. Now a mouse’s eye is much smaller than a coyote’s, and only let in a small amount of light, making it hard for Coyote to see. Coyote continued on in the forest, and soon he met Buffalo. Coyote told Buffalo how he lost his eyes, and that Mouse helped him, but how it was difficult to see. Buffalo consoled Coyote by giving him one of his eyes. Now a buffalo’s eyes are much larger than a coyote’s, and let in so much light that Coyote could see too much. Now having two different eyes, Coyote no longer saw things in the same way again.¹

It is easy to dismiss or misread this story as Coyote should have left well enough alone, but Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, and Boquet (2007) offer this reading from their book The everyday writing center: “A new worldview…is Coyote’s way of turning his foolishness into ours: ‘Coyote is said to trick the learner into the lesson, almost giving one the notion that things are not as they seem’…” (p. 16). This Trickster story could easily be read as a cautionary tale: to be happy with what one already has and to not go poking around where one shouldn’t. After all, Coyote has humiliated himself in front of humans: his eyes are eaten, thus forever gone, but Geller et al. have a different set of eyes in which they view this tale: “We live in an either-or world, a world

¹This story of how Coyote loses his eyes is adapted from Navajo Trickster Tale. I condensed the version that appears in this text by taking out some of the dialogue, but staying true to the metaphors in the original. I want to explicitly say that this story is not my own. And I do not treat the responsibility of using this story that is not a part of my culture cavalierly. This tale is used as it is intended: as a method of teaching, not to culturally appropriate another.
that doesn’t offer much opportunity to be uncertain, or tickled, or puzzled. How much time do we leave… to be surprised, to try out different eyes…” (p.16). I wonder at how often we invite Coyote to join our work. When those moments of uncertainty crop up- moments where we ask Are writing consultants ready to be tutors? How much learning is happening in the writing center? Are we doing what we should be doing? These are moments where bluffing is so tempting. Perhaps you’ve noticed the moment when someone tries to bluff you. Maybe it was a class you took where the professor didn’t know the answer but gave a soliloquy on a completely different topic, which only showed that he didn’t have the answer but didn’t want to look foolish by admitting it. Whatever the circumstance, when we try to bluff our way through, people pick up on it. By taking up Coyote’s story of wonder and curiosity, by not heedng Rabbit’s warning of throwing our eyes too many times, we too can gain eyes that, although different from the ones we had before, will show us new perspectives on the work we do within higher education.

A MEMORY

He was a PhD student in one of the hard sciences. I have long forgotten his name, but his story stays with me. “What brings you in today?” I asked; a typical way I would start a writing consultation in those days. “Grammar,” he replied, as most of the writers I worked with over the years would say. He had only booked a half-hour appointment, more than enough time to talk about the two abstracts he brought with him. “My adviser sent me here: he says that I have a lot of work to do on grammar.” It was true that his paper was slashed with red pen: lines through words, squiggly marks here and there, and esoteric words like awk written under certain sentences. All this is to say the paper looked like it had gone to war and came out the loser of the battle. As I read through I couldn’t help but notice that many of the adviser’s markings didn’t make sense to me. “Why did he cross this part out?” I asked the student. “I don’t really know,” he replied. I was perplexed; I couldn’t find any major trouble with grammar. Since his field of study was so different from mine, I asked questions about content and clarity for the audience in which he was writing to, but he said that what he had written was appropriate. After I had read over both abstracts, and asked my novice questions, I told him that I couldn’t find any issues with his writing. I apologized for not being helpful. He seemed strangely satisfied with our consultation. As he was packing his papers into his bag, he remarked that his adviser was really strict on grammar, and he was under the impression that the adviser didn’t like him much. I made some lame comment in commiseration, “Yeah, it must be tough to have to work with someone like that,” and he was on his way. It was after he left that I wondered, maybe it was the name attached to the student; maybe it was that he was an international student, a trace of a Korean accent to his English, but undeniably understandable to any who care to listen first and judge based on name later.

The PhD student I worked with years ago is a consultation I have often reflected on. I had one academic years’ work of writing center experience, and at the time I worried that this consultation had got awry. The consultation itself only took 15 of the 30 minutes the writer had signed up for, which made me feel like I might have rushed through reading the abstracts. We spent little time going over the abstracts, with more time focused on talking about the writer’s adviser. But as I play the memory back in my mind, I can see Coyote lurking in the writing center with me that day. Many tutoring handbooks, grammar and style guides, textbooks, and teachers will tell you that I should have stayed on track by focusing on grammar; to make sure that every definite article was definitely where they should be. It was this consultation that marked the moment where I lost my eyes, where I realized for the first time that sometimes teachers make assumptions about students with names that aren’t John Smith. Sometimes teachers read for errors where there are none, because the teacher hasn’t found new eyes to look at students’ writing. And there are assumptions made when a student has an accent that doesn’t sound like the flat Midwest dialect, an accent that is so revered in Northern America due to its lack of regional identifiers. This consultation marked the moment where Coyote came into full focus for me and I followed his call, making for a richer story to tell about writing
centers than the one I could have told about sticking to
the adviser’s comments, and pretending that grammar
was what we should talk about when clearly there
were other more insidious issues at play. It made for
a moment where I began learning how to be a writing
tutor who looks not only at the words on the paper, but
also finds ways to help writers navigate conversations
with their teachers about writing.

In the book *Peripheral visions for writing centers*
(2013), McKinney urges writing center scholars to
look at the narratives we tell rather than through the
lens themselves: “…many stories could be told of our
spaces, yet predominantly, one story is told” (p. 21).
The chapter that most captivated me was “Writing
Centers Tutor (All Students).” Here, McKinney
unpacks underlying assumptions within writing center
narratives: that the writer (not the tutor) does all the
work; that the tutor is not a teacher, but a guide; that
tutorials happen one-with-one (McKinney, 2013, pp.
59-60). In writing center scholarship, phrases such as
Higher Order Concerns, Lower Order Concerns, Non-
directive tutoring, and minimalist tutoring are terms
that we all know: “We say we want all students to
come to our centers, to feel ‘comfortable’ in our ‘non-
traditional’ setting, but when we narrate normal and
abnormal tutoring scenarios in tutor training manuals,
we reveal our unease with working with a vast array
of students” (70). McKinney is noticing how, when we
talk about “best practices” in the tutoring of writing,
we are often talking about “best practices” for white,
cis gender, straight students. But this vision of student
is one that is changing. Remember this quote from
the beginning of this article: “We live in an either-or
world, a world that doesn’t offer much opportunity to
be uncertain, or tickled, or puzzled. How much time
do we leave… to be surprised, to try out different
eyes?” (Geller et al., 2007). Coyote’s eyes are one way
of looking at the value students who don’t identify as
white, cis, or straight bring to ways of knowing, and
how these ways of knowing complicate traditional
modes of learning and thinking.

McKinney is not the only one to notice this trend: In
“Rethinking writing center work to transform a system
of advantage based on race” (2007), Grimm begins
to articulate how new narratives need to be explored
within writing center work: “the notion that all college
students speak a ‘privileged variety of English.’ This
assumption about students leaves untroubled the notion
that ‘writing well’ is the ability to produce English that
is unmarked in the eyes of teachers who are custodians
of privileged varieties of English” (p. 80). Coyote’s
story is one that we can carry with us to add to, and
counter, traditional ways of knowing and of the work we
do within higher education. For many of us, it is easier
to bluff our way through difficulties; it is easier to tell,
retell, and recycle the stories that pervade intellectual
spaces. I could have pulled a grammar manual and used
that to look through the PhD student’s paper; but at
what cost to the student’s voice and my tutor practice?
If we are willing to lose
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MANAGING YOUR FIRST 365: START WITH THE CAS STANDARDS

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The use of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Self-Assessment Guides and the Learning Assistance Program Standards and Guidelines was essential to negotiating my first year as the director of a learning center. This article describes how preparing for, conducting, and responding to the results of a CAS self-assessment can shape a new director’s leadership in the first months.

As a first-time director of a learning center, I doubted that my new colleagues would grant me much credibility or authority. I found myself suffering from imposter syndrome and thought that no one should have hired me as a “director” of anything. I had limited experience with all the intricacies of managing a learning center. However, my campus showed a willingness to take a chance on me. To lead the center in a new direction, the administrators wanted someone with energy and a love of numbers and technology, and there I was.

How did a woman with a law degree become the director of a learning center? As Frank Christ said, “Like most learning center directors, I migrated to learning assistance” (Landsberger, 2007). I had served as a Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leader in my undergraduate days and as a mentor in law school, so education may have been my calling all along. Therefore, once in higher education, I was purposeful in the way that I explored smaller leadership experiences to navigate my way to a management role. I was also fortunate that my supervisors in previous roles gave me the guidance, trust, and leeway to gain those experiences.

Immediately upon arriving at this new center, I gathered all the staff and faculty lab directors and chaired a meeting at which we conducted a quick SWOT analysis. I had chosen to carry a notebook with me at all times that has since enabled me to look back and see the conclusions we drew in that initial meeting. There were three important aspects that were working (great space, good reputation, and dedicated faculty and staff leadership) and many that were not. I saw the strengths of the Center but also the shortcomings, some of which were due to their limited exposure to national standards and expectations in this area. In order to make my first year a success, I sought to find a way to lead significant change in the Center and utilize authoritative and credible sources. This is where the CAS standards came into play.

Being an administrator or manager means that you have mastery of such things as “setting priorities, delegating tasks, controlling expenditures, and getting things done on time” (Davis, 2003, p. 4). Being a leader is another role entirely. In a leadership relationship, both leaders and followers have a mutual purpose to make real change. Developing relationships and shared purpose take time. They are processes. Trying to drive the process from the top down—or changing things just to give the leader a role to play in the organization—would be useless. The SWOT process indicated areas where making changes could improve the center’s success, and making those changes would require my leadership.

DECIDING TO USE CAS

There are four essential phases to navigating change: discover, decide, do, and discern (Dinwoodie, Pasmore, Quinn, & Rabin, 2015). The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Learning Assistance Program Standards and Guidelines and the Self-Assessment Guides developed by CAS provided an excellent way to discover how well the center was accomplishing its mission, decide what changes needed to be made, do what was necessary to adjust our programs for success, and discern how the revisions worked. The authority of the CAS standards gave me the credibility needed to help the Center achieve its potential.

Benchmarking a learning assistance program
against criterion-referenced standards is a powerful way to conduct assessment (Norton & Agee, 2014), and the CAS standards are holistic enough to address all areas of a center, from mission, program, leadership, staff, and financial resources to assessment. And finally, the consensus approach, which CAS uses to develop the standards and which is essential to the self-study process, inspired the approach that the staff and I thought appropriate for improvement of our programs and services.

**DISCOVER THROUGH A PROCESS**

CAS Self-Assessment Guides are meant to be used by those internal to an area (program leaders, staff, and stakeholders) to assess what is working and what is not, based on criterion-referenced standards and guidelines for practice. This process does not advocate for an external evaluator but instead values the inside voices and lived experiences of those in the center. Stakeholders from across campus may be invited to assess the program using the evidence amassed by program personnel, but the first step is to conduct the internal outcomes and program measurements. We operationalized this effort over the course of an academic year. The faculty directors and administrative staff of our learning center (at a mid-sized public four-year institution) assessed our programs and services using the CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education (2012a): Learning Assistance Programs (LAP).

First, we educated ourselves about the CAS standards ("must" statements), guidelines ("should" and "may" statement), and the CAS LAP Self-Assessment Guide. Then we established how we would conduct the self-study process and who would serve on the review team. This work included monthly individual reviews of the criterion items followed by team meetings to discuss discrepancies in scoring, current strengths, and needed improvements. We sorted the twelve sections of the standards into five manageable groups:

1. Mission; Program; Organization and Leadership
2. Human Resources; Ethics; Law, Policy, and Governance
3. Diversity, Equity, and Access; Institutional and External Relations
4. Financial Resources; Technology; Facilities and Equipment
5. Assessment and Evaluation

We deliberated over the five groups at monthly meetings over the course of five months. During this period the learning center was under new direction, with new leaders in the Director and Associate Director positions; therefore, as changes were made (such as even having monthly Directors Meetings) they were acknowledged as “current strengths,” because those changes were assumed to be permanent and positive.

**DECIDE WHAT TO TACKLE**

At each monthly meeting every person on our team contributed what he or she viewed as strengths and weaknesses of the Center. Discrepancies among the team members’ assessments led to interesting discussions that showed the varying perspectives of staff, who dealt with the day-to-day operations of the Center, and the faculty lab directors, who were more in tune with academic or discipline-specific issues. For instance, some of the scoring discrepancies in the Law, Policy, and Governance portion of the CAS self-assessment were due to some personnel’s not understanding that the Center is bound by the same law, policy, and governance as the College. Therefore, many of these items did not need to be addressed by the LAP beyond a general awareness of the College’s guidelines. At the end of each meeting, we asked all participants to turn in their documentary evidence, and we compiled them in a large notebook.

At the end of the self-assessment process, a staff member was tasked with reviewing each person’s evidence and completing the self-assessment guide report by providing the Part and Part Number, Discrepancies, Strengths, and Needed Improvements. This provided me with some distance from the individual assessment packets and made the process more impartial. Then, as the Director, I went back and wrote narratives to accompany each of the twelve sections, therefore

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1 A ninth edition of the standards was published in 2015, and revised LAP standards have been approved by the CAS Board of Directors in November 2016, but the 2012 LAP standards were current at the time of our self-assessment.
DO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The final step we took involved summarizing our goals at the end of the document and matching them with strategies for implementation. This enabled us to make decisions about task allocation and timelines for goal completion as organized by year. Another dimension that emerged from this process was the necessary addition of task items on an annual calendar of tasks that would be edited each spring.

Some of the changes instituted were small and unanimous, such as needing to include the words learning and development in our Center’s mission. Other changes took more time and discussion, such as revising our Tutor Manual. The Manual was eventually transformed into a Student Employee Manual to encompass all of our student employees, rather than singling out tutors. We narrowed potential areas of confusion, such as deciding to include only one code of ethics rather than the two that were originally in the document. Another needed improvement was to “make assessments more available to multiple constituencies,” which we did by creating a Data & Reports portion to our website and posting our annual reports there. A final example of a needed improvement was that our facility was not adequately equipped for students with disabilities. The front door to the Center was unnecessarily heavy and had no automatic door opener. Although this piece of equipment was necessary, it was difficult to obtain, even after filing a complaint with the College. A simpler solution was to install a doorbell by the front door with a sign next to it and to plug in the chime feature into an outlet in our front office. That worked and highlighted the ingenuity that it would take to do what needed to be done.

At the time of this publication, there are issues that remain ongoing. Although the CAS self-study indicated that the Center needs more financial resources to accomplish its mission, this is a concern that the Center continues to contend with. Figuring out how to create a stable funding base while usage increases beyond the current budget or deciding where to make budgetary cuts and expansions as service demands change--these are still works in progress. Many of these issues are dependent upon forces and authorities outside our department, where we had no control; however, we used the power of persuasion to discuss our budget concerns at every opportunity and did see a substantial shift in the budget. After more than a decade of severe underfunding, the Center at last broke even several years in a row.

DISCERN IF THE PROCESS WORKED

So, how did we do? Of the 13 items we had listed as goals, we completed 10 within four years. Given the fact that many of our accomplishments began with a SWOT analysis in the first week of work, we consider this to be a rather successful outcome. One of our greatest accomplishments was aligning the CRLA International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC) of the different tutoring labs (Writing, Math, Speaking, Science, Foreign Language, Accounting, and Individual) by engaging in a three year process of coordinating all tutor applications, tutor observations, tutor hours tracking, and training topics so that all tutors in the Center would have the opportunity to seek Levels I, II, and III certification.

For the purpose of establishing credibility for the new leadership team, I believe the CAS Self-Assessment process worked well. I was able to solidify myself as an authority on campus and construct a strong vision and plan for success for the Center. I believe that the self-assessment process elevated the learning center and provided us with a mutual purpose: faculty, staff, and students working together to create peer education opportunities that make a difference.
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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Melissa Thomas is the previous Director of the Center for Student Learning at the College of Charleston where she provided leadership and management to all the programs and service provided by the Center. Before that, Melissa has been an adjunct instructor, P.I. for a multi-year grant, coordinator of a graduate student academic support program, and Past President of the College Reading and Learning Association. Currently, she is a Lecturer for the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin for their TIP Scholars program. Her research interests include writing anxiety, motivation inside the classroom, conflict, communication, and assessment. Melissa holds a Juris Doctorate (J.D.) from the University of Texas at Austin and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication from the University of Texas at San Antonio.