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Developing a Centralized Tutoring System: A Comprehensive Resource Available for Students

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Catherine Johnson

Developing a Centralized Tutoring System: A Comprehensive Resource Available for Students

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Education in Higher Education

At

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Peer tutoring at colleges and universities has become an essential resource in helping to enhance undergraduate students’ academic performance and persistence (Arco-Tirado, Fernández-Martin, & Fernández-Balboa, 2011), institutional retention rates (Grillo & Leist, 2013), and the academic abilities of students with learning disabilities (Troiano, Liefeld, & Trachtenberg, 2010). The Tutoring Center at Merrimack College, designed for this project, will house all peer tutors specializing in a variety of subjects, including, but not limited to: business, engineering, foreign languages, computer science, biology, and chemistry. According to Vygotsky’s (1978) learning theory, students learn most effectively and more thoroughly when working with more knowledgeable and skillful peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, to increase access to tutors, the tutors will be available through the Learning Labs, which allow students to work with a peer tutor on a drop-in basis, and they will also have appointment hours available to meet with students who seek more individualized support. This project seeks to centralize all tutors in one location and to provide greater academic services by employing tutors with more versatile academic specialties. By doing so, the tutors will become more accessible to a larger population of undergraduate students, and the academic support efforts of Merrimack College will become streamlined.
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Developing a Centralized Tutoring System: A Comprehensive Resource Available to Students

Undergraduate students encounter enormous pressures during their college careers, particularly in regards to being academically successful, and on-campus tutoring centers are invaluable resources for students facing academic challenges and difficulties (Colver & Fry, 2016). By offering individualized and focused support, peer tutoring can enhance students’ ability to understand and apply concepts, which can therefore generate more comprehensive learning experiences for undergraduate students (National Tutoring Association, n.d.). Among the many benefits of peer tutoring, it can generate more positive student attitudes towards subject matter and self-concepts, provide a cost-effective way to improve math, reading, and cognitive abilities of students, encourage the use of effective and efficient learning methods and strategies, and present opportunities for questions and clarification of challenging concepts (National Tutoring Association, n.d.). It also produces beneficial outcomes for the tutors, as tutors can enhance their confidence in their learning abilities, higher level thinking capacities, communication skills, and knowledge of effective study strategies (National Tutoring Association, n.d.).

The necessity of tutoring services and academic support resources can stem, in part, from the negative impact that academic stress can have on the health and well-being of college students. For example, in a study conducted by Upright, Esslinger, and Hays (2014) seeking to identify the most common health issues of college students, stress was the top-ranked health factor that affected academic performance. Additionally, 39.2% of students in this study indicated that the pressure generated by their academics was even more traumatic to them than losing a family member (Upright et al., 2014). By providing peer support in a variety of academic areas, tutoring centers can help reduce the confusion, frustration, and hopelessness that
students sometimes face and can engender greater confidence and positivity. Incoming college students, transitioning from high school, also need to adjust to different instructional methods, expectations, and demands of instructors as well as the heightened time and energy required to complete college-level work (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). The quality of high school education can greatly impact college readiness, and peer tutoring is an effective intervention in improving the academic preparation of students transitioning from high school to college (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

By streamlining support services and heavily promoting them across campus, institutions can foster the help-seeking behavior of students. Merrimack College provides extensive peer tutoring support in math-based courses by offering drop-in assistance from both peer and professional tutors at The Tutoring & Math Center. However, there are unmet needs of students that are seeking assistance in non-math-related courses. Subject tutors for non-math-related courses are employed through their respective academic departments, though some departments/academic areas have limited numbers of tutors available, or simply do not have any. Anecdotally, as the Academic Support & Advising Graduate Fellow, I have observed and received feedback from students that accessing non-math-related tutoring is very challenging, as subject tutors are dispersed throughout campus and are only available during specific days/times. In this paper, I propose that Merrimack College streamlines and centralizes all peer tutoring services by creating The Tutoring Center, which will provide more accessible and more versatile tutors for all undergraduate students. Merrimack College is ready to align with national trends by advancing and expanding the peer tutoring services available to students.

The following literature review will provide further rationale for this project and the benefits of tutoring on academic performance and persistence, the retention of at-risk students, and the academic abilities of students with learning disabilities.
The Impact of Tutoring on Academic Performance/Success in College

Seeking to determine the impact of a peer tutoring program on various measures of academic performance among first-year college students, Arco-Tirado, Fernández-Martin, and Fernández-Balboa (2011) conducted an experimental study where a total of 100 first-year students were randomly assigned to either a treatment group or a control group. The intervention involved 50 students participating in ten 90-minute tutoring sessions throughout their first semester of college, which were led by 41 tutors, all of whom had completed four 3-hour training sessions on topics such as cognitive learning strategies, time management, goal setting, exam preparation, and social skills. The matching of the first-year students with their respective tutors involved analyzing similarities within program of study, schedules, and nationality. After analyzing the results of a peer tutoring program on first-year students’ Grade Point Average (GPA) and Performance Rate (PR), it was found that students scored higher than 58% of the students within the control group, highlighting that a peer tutoring program does enhance academic success. It was also found that the program strengthened the students’ study planning, use of study materials, and learning of content.

Additionally, Arco-Tirado et al. (2011) were interested in determining the effects of a peer tutoring program on the tutors; by participating in the 12 hours of training and a semester of tutoring first-year students, the tutors’ confidence in communicating and presenting increased, they were able to gain experience managing people, and they developed better study habits for themselves as well. This study’s implications include that peer tutoring, on a regular basis, can help first year students develop strategies and skills that can help them be academically successful, and it can provide tutors with the opportunity to enhance their academic and interpersonal abilities.
Like Arco-Tirado et al. (2011), Lidren and Meier (1991) also sought to measure the effectiveness of tutoring on the academic performance of undergraduate students. In contrast, however, Lidren & Meier (1991) analyzed the outcomes of two different levels of tutoring, intensive and minimal, on academic performance within in a specific college course. The sample consisted of 193 undergraduate college students enrolled in two sections of an introductory psychology course, and 12 undergraduate psychology majors with GPAs higher than 3.0 that served as the tutors. To heighten their effectiveness in aiding the students, all tutors attended a one hour review session every week with the instructor(s) to discuss pertinent course material and assignments. Section 1 of the course received the intensive tutoring procedures, which included smaller peer tutoring groups and one hour per week of peer-to-student contact, whereas Section 2 received the minimal procedures with larger peer tutoring groups and no additional time per week than Section 1.

To determine the impact of both the intensive and minimal tutoring, the students’ final introductory psychology course grades were compared between Section 1, Section 2, and the control groups (no tutoring) within each section. Although it was found that both intensive and minimal tutoring procedures effectively enhanced the students’ academic performance in the course, the students that received tutoring in Section 1 received significantly higher final grades than their counterparts in Section 2. Regarding academic performance without the presence of tutors, there was very little difference found in the grades between the control groups in both course sections. This study highlights that one hour per week of contact with a peer tutor is adequate in producing important academic outcomes as well as the effectiveness of implementing specialized tutors within specific courses that receive weekly review sessions from the instructor(s).
Obtaining a more focused lens than Arco-Tirado et al. (2011) and Lidren and Meier (1991) by studying a specific structure of tutoring in place at a higher education institution, Cooper (2010) analyzed the impact of drop-in tutoring and the frequency of visits on first-year students’ persistence, academic standing, and cumulative GPA. Cooper used TutorTrac software to study the usage of the tutoring center by the first-year cohort, including number of visits, hours spent, and the classes for which they were seeking help, as each student that visited the center was required to swipe his or her student ID; when reviewing the data, the researcher categorized the students by center usage: greater than or equal to 10 visits, fewer than 10 visits, and 0 visits. Major findings in the study include that first-year students who visited the drop-in tutoring center more than 10 times in a semester were more likely to persist to the next academic semester and were more likely to be in good academic standing. They also had higher cumulative GPAs, which was a trend that held across race, ethnicity, SAT scores, and high school GPA. First-year students who visited the tutoring center even just one time were found to be more likely to persist than students that did not visit the center at all.

Interestingly, a delay was discovered regarding when the correlation between tutoring visits and GPA was expected to emerge: fall semester center usage was more likely to impact spring semester cumulative GPA. The significance of this study lies in the fact that drop-in tutoring was proven to be an effective intervention for academic performance and persistence, even if a student only visits the center once during a semester, as well as the fact that the positive outcomes of tutoring on cumulative GPA might not be seen until the following semester. The latter is especially pertinent knowledge for higher education professionals, as they will need to consistently motivate and encourage students to continue to visit the tutoring center, even though students might not be meeting their academic goals as quickly as may be anticipated.
Colver and Fry (2016), in comparison to Cooper (2010), also studied the efficacy of a particular tutoring structure, specifically one that requires the signing of a tutoring contract in order to receive academic support services. In this study, 853 students adhered to the contract, which required them to attend two 50-minute tutoring sessions every week during the semester. Colver and Fry (2016) established two additional goals of their study, which included determining students’ perceptions of tutoring after utilizing the services and determining students’ final grades after receiving tutoring in a course they were retaking. The three goals constituted three separate phases of the study. Regarding findings from Phase I, tutoring was most consistently perceived to impact understanding of course material, to improve quality of work on assignments, and to increase academic confidence. Phase II results demonstrated significantly higher grades for students that adhered to the tutoring contract, and interestingly, the strongest relationship was established between final course grades and number of weeks active in tutoring, rather than total number of hours.

Phase III findings from the sample of 136 students that were repeating an undergraduate course showed that peer tutoring had a strong, positive impact on course outcomes for classes taken a second time when comparing grades to the first-attempt; of importance, it was also found that there was the greatest difference between the final grades of first-generation college students when comparing their first attempt at a course to their second attempt with the addition of tutoring. The implications of this study are drawn from the proven effectiveness of requiring students to sign a tutoring contract to receive services, the fact that distributing tutoring sessions is more effective as a study strategy rather than spending large blocks of time in a tutoring center, and the importance of institutions creating awareness of academic services to first-generation students.
Tutoring as a Retention Strategy for At-Risk College Students

Tutoring has shown through research to be a sufficient support tool in retaining at-risk college students, meaning those who are socially, financially, and/or academically underprepared for college. One example of such research includes Rheinheimer, Grace-Odeleye, Francois, and Kusorgbor’s (2010) study, which utilized a longitudinal research study to assess the impact of tutoring as a support strategy for at-risk students at a public university in Pennsylvania. The sample consisted of 129 at-risk students – tracked as a cohort through to graduation or withdrawal - from a state-funded program, called Act 101, which is constructed to provide support services for both economically and educationally disadvantaged college students. Data was derived from the university’s tutoring database as well as from the students’ academic records, and variables studied by the researchers included retention, use and frequency of tutoring, measures of academic performance, and total credits earned toward graduation.

After compiling the data, significant findings demonstrate that at-risk students who received tutoring were 13.5 times more likely to graduate than at-risk students that did not receive tutoring, and students who graduated were assigned over six more tutors per semester than students who withdrew from the university. Overall, the findings demonstrate that at-risk students who request tutoring are more likely to graduate than their non-tutored counterparts. This study highlights the importance of first identifying at-risk students and then targeting that student population with the advertisement of tutoring support services early on in their college careers; it is possible for the struggles of at-risk students to go unnoticed, particularly in regards to a lack of college readiness, as they do not always have the confidence and self-advocacy skills to admit needing help and then seek that help from campus resources. Because tutoring can provide students with the skills and tenacity to persist to graduation, it is vital for educators to
encourage and empower students to take ownership of their education beginning in their first few weeks of their college careers.

Sharing a similar goal to the study completed by Rheinheimer et al. (2010), Russ (2017) also sought to determine the competency of tutoring on the academic performance of at-risk college students. However, in contrast to Rheinheimer et al. (2010), which studied the impact of tutoring as a whole for at-risk students, Russ (2017) used an ex post facto design to establish if there is a difference between group tutoring and individual tutoring on the academic outcomes of at-risk college students. The researcher analyzed data from the academic records of 95 first-year college students that were accepted into the university provisionally, where enrollment and participation in the Academic Enrichment Program (AEP) were required; the AEP is a two semester program designed to help students that have been identified through the admissions process as underprepared and/or at-risk. The academic advisor of the AEP randomly assigned students either to group tutoring sessions, which were held in a classroom, or one-to-one tutoring sessions, which were held in the tutoring center.

Intuitively, one could assume that the one-to-one tutoring sessions would be more effective on final grade outcomes, as they provide opportunities for more individualized methods and approaches. However, it was discovered in this study that students who attended group tutoring received higher final course grades than those students that attended one-to-one tutoring (an average of approximately 13 grade-points higher). The researcher explains this finding with the reasoning that students who attend group tutoring have the opportunity to hear other students’ relevant contributions and perspectives. The data also highlights that students who received tutoring from their peers had better final grades than those who received tutoring from professional tutors. The effectiveness of group tutoring shown within the results of this study can change the landscape of tutoring structures for at-risk students, as it could be beneficial for
transition programs for underprepared students to offer both group tutoring and one-to-one tutoring. Of further importance, tutoring programs that employ students who are similar in age, grade, or academic level to the tutees will increase the efficacy of the tutoring program, demonstrating that a greater amount of funds should be designated towards employing student workers than towards hiring professional tutors at an institution.

Similar to Russ (2017) who analyzed data of at-risk students’ participation in the Academic Enrichment Program, Grillo and Leist (2013) evaluated data from a retention program implemented at the University of Louisville for high-risk populations of students, titled the Resources for Academic Achievement program (REACH). Grillo and Leist (2013) aimed to assess the impact of the total number of hours spent in REACH instructional support services, including drop-in tutoring, appointment-based tutoring, and course-specific study sessions/exam reviews. Using a binary logistic regression method and controlling for college readiness indicators such as ACT scores, SAT scores, and high school GPAs, it was found that academic support had a positive association with the retention and graduation rates of a very large and diverse population of at-risk students. As total number of hours spent using academic support increased, the resulting GPAs increased as well as the likelihood of graduating. The researchers stated that students who maintained higher GPAs from engaging in support services likely improved “their confidence in their own ability to learn or… develop[ed] a sense of empowerment or self-efficacy necessary for college success” (Grillo & Leist, 2013, p. 402). Significant implications of this study include the necessity for institutions to provide not only appointment-based tutoring and drop-in tutoring, but also Supplemental Instruction Programs that offer course-specific study sessions and exam reviews. Parallel to the previously described implications of Russ (2017), Grillo and Leist (2013) suggest that institutions should heavily promote their academic support services to new students and to their families, providing students
who enroll in the university with knowledge about the resources available early on in their college careers.

In addition to studying the utilization of tutoring services as a significant influencer on the academic success of at-risk college students, Lasket and Hetzel (2011) also studied the influence of personality factors of at-risk students on retention and college GPA. Data collected in this study were extracted over three consecutive years from the student records of 115 at-risk students who were participating in the College Acceptance Program (CAP), a two semester program that allows students that do not meet the admission requirements (high school GPA of 2.0 and ACT composite score of 20) to apply for provisional admission through CAP. The students that are accepted in CAP are required to meet with a tutor once a week, attend weekly meetings with a small peer group, and take two developmental courses: College Reading and College Study Strategies. At the end of the first year, students with a 2.0 are automatically admitted to the university while those that did not receive a 2.0 are dismissed from the school.

The personality factors studied of students in CAP included agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness, and extraversion, and participants completed a self-assessment that uses a five point scale for 60 self-report items measuring the five personality domains. In addition to the greater likelihood that CAP students who received tutoring at least once a week were being retained and admitted into the university, it was also found that students scoring higher in conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness were more likely to utilize tutoring services, achieve higher GPAs, and be retained. Neuroticism also had a positive relationship to college GPA. In contrast, students that scored higher in extraversion were less likely to be retained, the reason for which the researchers state is possibly because those students were more concerned with socializing than with focusing on their academics. This study emphasizes the importance of personality in the utilization of tutoring services by at-risk students, and it is vital
for educators to be aware of the fact that at-risk students low in conscientiousness will require more support and encouragement to use tutoring services. Overall, when students can feel comfortable seeking support and asking the tutors questions that they might not feel are valid questions for their professors (agreeableness and openness), those students will be more likely to feel successful in their academic pursuits and more likely to persist after their first year of college.

**Peer Tutoring Support for College Students with Learning Disabilities**

Because the number of college students with learning disabilities is growing each academic year, it is necessary for institutions to regularly assess the effectiveness of the services offered for students with accommodations, particularly services that provide specialized academic support. Kowalsky and Fresko (2002) considered the use of peer tutoring for two groups of college students with disabilities: students with learning disabilities and students with visual impairments, and the tutoring was carried out within the framework of the PERACH project for students with learning disabilities. Within the learning disabilities group (LD group), the sample consisted of two tutors and five tutees, and the visually impaired group (VI group) sample consisted of five tutors and five tutees. Both the tutors and tutees within the LD group and the tutees within the VI group were interviewed in-depth by the researchers about their experiences and thoughts on tutoring; the tutors in the VI group, on the other hand, participated in a semi-structured focus group about the same topics. Tutors from both groups also participated in workshops throughout the academic year, and LD tutees participated in these workshops as well.

The data in this study were organized around three major topics: content of the tutoring activity, attitudes toward the tutoring experience, and difficulties encountered. Findings of note, specifically regarding attitudes toward the tutoring experience, include that tutoring was
described by the tutees in both groups as academically and socially beneficial. When tutees received help from only one tutor throughout the year, the tutees were able to develop a sense of comfort more quickly, which enhanced the social outcomes of the tutees and made for more productive tutoring sessions. Tutors also described both professional and personal benefits drawn from the tutoring experiences. In terms of problems encountered during sessions, LD group tutors and tutees described an inability of the tutors to understand the tutees’ disabilities and needs as most problematic, and the tutors also reported the high level of dependency that the tutees developed on the tutors as a significant obstacle. It is clear through the findings of this study that the effectiveness of peer tutoring could be enhanced with the addition of regular and on-going professional consultation with campus accommodations experts; this consultation could help tutors and tutees learn to define needs and expectations, enrich modes in which the needs are met during sessions, and prevent a sense of dependency from developing on the tutors by helping tutors learn to set boundaries with the tutees. Overall, this study indicated that tutoring is an extremely helpful academic support mechanism for students with disabilities of various kinds and has both personal and professional benefits for the tutors as well.

Similarly to Kowalsky and Fresko (2002), Vogel, Fresko, and Wertheim (2007) also evaluated peer tutoring in the context of the PERACH project to identify tutoring perceptions of both tutees and tutors. However, Vogel et al. (2007) focused only on students with learning disabilities. To gather data, research questionnaires were distributed to 234 tutees (students with learning disabilities) and 316 tutors across multiple universities within the United States that have implemented the PERACH project, and the variables were measured using a five point scale for a total of 32 questions. The questions asked respondents to indicate the extent to which 1) difficulties and needs characterized the tutee; 2) tutoring sessions dealt with different skills and tasks; 3) situations hindered tutoring; 4) similar backgrounds were deemed important to
successful tutoring; and 5) satisfaction with the tutoring experience (five categories). Regarding
difficulties and needs of the tutees, attention and concentration deficits were rated by both the
tutees and the tutors as the most severe of difficulties encountered during sessions, as well as
studying for exams, reading materials, and summarizing articles. The most notable difficulty
faced during a tutoring session as described by both tutors and tutees - similar to the results of
Kowalsky and Fresko (2002) - was that tutors did not have the sufficient skills to understand the
tutees’ learning difficulties, though tutors sensed the lack of skill to a greater degree than the
tutees. Tutors also reported that the tutees struggled with explaining their needs, which made the
tutors frequently unsure of how to help the students. This study strongly demonstrated the need
for more frequent and more comprehensive training for tutors on interacting and working with
students with learning disabilities, particularly understanding their needs and learning how to
establish relationships with these students. This study also presents the need for students with
learning disabilities to receive training in self-advocacy, which would include learning how to
identify their needs and then various ways to communicate those needs to others.

In contrast to Kowalsky and Fresko (2002) and Vogel et al. (2007), the study conducted
by Troiano, Liefeld, and Trachtenberg (2010) focused on academic support provided by learning
and writing specialists rather than peer tutors. Developing a study around the research question,
“would students who have better attendance at scheduled appointments [at the Learning
Resource Center] also have better collegiate outcomes to those students whose attendance was
lower than prescribed compliance levels?” (Troiano et al., 2010, p. 38), Troiano et al. (2010)
compared attendance levels at the Learning Resource Center (LRC), which provides services to
students with diagnosed learning disabilities on three different levels of student need - moving
from 4 hours of support per week to student-initiated appointments - to academic outcomes. The
sample included 262 college students with self-disclosed learning disabilities at a small, private,
liberal arts college, and five years of attendance data were analyzed through the LRC database. The researchers found that students who consistently attended academic support center appointments, whether scheduled by the learning specialist or initiated by the student, had higher rates of success than those who did not attend at all or did not attend on a regular basis; it was common for those students to have higher GPAs and higher rates of graduation persistence. Students’ levels of attendance in the LRC, results show, were predictors of graduation rates, and it was noted that the degree of learning support was a strong predictor of college graduation. The results highlight that the existence of trusting relationships formulated between learning specialists and students have as much of an impact on students’ successes as the quality of the guidance and support they receive. Although this study focuses on academic support provided by trained, professional specialists to students with learning disabilities, results from this study can be connected to the importance of peer tutors developing strong, trusting relationships with students with learning disabilities when the tutors serve as the prominent source of support and guidance for their tutees.

In conclusion, this literature review demonstrates that peer tutoring, implemented as a means of academic support for college students, can promote student persistence, retention, and academic performance. Peer tutoring has also been shown to strengthen the academic abilities of students with learning disabilities, particularly when a trusting relationship is developed between tutors and tutees. Promoting these services to prospective students and families as well as to first-year students during the first weeks of their college careers can greatly strengthen the utilization and accompanying benefits of campus tutoring centers. The literature also highlights several areas for growth regarding higher education tutoring services, such as providing more comprehensive training for tutors, identifying and then targeting at-risk students with the promotion of academic services, and incorporating group tutoring sessions for students facing
similar academic challenges.

**Theory Overview**

Lev Vygotsky, a scholar and teacher of psychology in Moscow in the 1920s, became interested in investigating the relationship between learning and development, particularly in regards to school-age children. Though his studies focused predominantly on children, his findings can also be applied to contexts that involve learning in the presence of what he refers to as *more knowledgeable others*, individuals with more advanced skill sets that can help others succeed in particular tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). He defined two developmental levels in relation to individuals’ learning capabilities, the first of which is called the *actual developmental level*: the skill sets and mental functions already established as a result of completed developmental cycles (Vygotsky, 1978). He defined the second level as the *level of proximal development*: the skill sets and mental functions that can be acquired through guidance and/or assistance from adults or more skillful peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The difference between these two developmental levels, formulating the foundation of his theory, is known as the *zone of proximal development*: “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 38). Summarily, Vygotsky asserted that interaction with more skillful peers is the most effective strategy for one’s development of greater skills and cognitive capacities.
Additionally, Vygotsky described the process of *scaffolding*, though the actual term was never used by Vygotsky and was introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976). Scaffolding is defined as a process that “enables [an individual] to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90). Once the individual (student) receives assistance after attempting unsuccessfully to complete a certain task, the student will be more likely to complete and then master the task in the future without additional assistance; they are able to witness effective methods of doing so from a more knowledgeable other and can then model those actions/behaviors such that practice can occur on a regular basis.

Although Vygotsky’s initial theory did not establish specific stages, Gallimore and Tharpe (1990) described the zone of proximal development as a four-stage and recurring process. Because each incident of scaffolding increases an individual’s level of actual development and thus enables the individual to handle tasks of greater difficulty, a cycling of these stages can occur many times throughout the lifetime, as learning is a continuous process (Gallimore &
Tharpe, 1990). Stage 1 involves assistance provided by more knowledgeable others (MKOs) or capable peers; Stage 2, after observation from the MKOs, focuses on assistance provided by self; Stage 3 is when an individual masters the task/skill, the task/skill is internalized and automatized, and the individual emerges from the zone of proximal development; and lastly, Stage 4 is associated with an individual struggling with a different task/skill (de-automatization of performance) and then cycling though through the previous three stages again (Gallimore & Tharpe, 1990). In order for a student to cognitively develop and successfully move through these stages, a sufficient learning environment must be provided such that students have the ability to learn from more capable peers on a regular basis (Gallimore & Tharpe, 1990).

This project involves creating a centralized tutoring system at Merrimack College, called The Tutoring Center, where all subject tutors specializing in a variety of academic areas will be located in one center in order to streamline the peer support services that are offered. Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development theory will be applied to this project through the tutor training procedures. It will be important for the tutors that are hired to work in the new center to gain a comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities to their peers, particularly that they will be acting as capable peers (MKOs) in a specific subject area that will work in collaboration with other students to facilitate learning. The tutors will be guiding students from their level of actual development to their level of potential development by introducing their peers to various methods, strategies, and processes that their peers can then master through regular practice and application without future assistance. The tutors’ role is not simply to provide direct answers; it is to act as facilitators of more substantial learning experiences and greater cognitive capacities. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory will serve as the foundation for the Tutor Training Day, required for all new tutors, and will guide the conversation such that the all tutors have a
thorough understanding of Vygotsky’s (1978) theory and how it will serve as the base for their work at The Tutoring Center.

**Project Introduction**

The literature stresses the substantial benefits of peer tutoring on the academic performance of undergraduate students, particularly students with learning disabilities, and as a means of retention for at-risk students. It also implies that promoting these resources early on in students’ college careers and making the services as accessible as possible to undergraduate students can greatly enhance the utilization of tutoring centers. Merrimack College, through The Tutoring & Math Center, provides students with valuable and comprehensive peer support in math-based courses. Subject tutors, such as those in General Chemistry, Accounting for Business, and World Languages, are employed by their respective academic departments and are located in several different buildings across campus with specific hours during which such tutoring is provided. There is considerable room for growth regarding the tutoring system at Merrimack College, particularly in centralizing tutoring services, providing a greater number of courses in which students can seek peer support, and increasing the number of hours each week where subject tutors are available. This project aims to advance the tutoring services at Merrimack College by converging all tutoring services across campus to one location, called The Tutoring Center, and employing tutors with a wide range of academic specialties such that services will become more versatile and more accessible to all students.

The components included in the project buildout will provide thorough information regarding the physical space of the center, the timeline of implementation, both professional staff and student staff job descriptions and hiring processes, tutor orientation and training, the communication and outreach plan, and the budget for the first fiscal year of the center’s opening.
The Tutoring Center will be located on the third floor of McQuade Library, as it will be a central part of the Academic Success Center, and it is the current location of The Tutoring & Math Center. The floor plan for the center is designed with the intention to promote a welcoming atmosphere to Merrimack students such that even if they are not utilizing the tutoring services, they can take advantage of the resources and the many tables, couches and reading chairs available when in need of a relatively quiet space to work or read. Upon entering the center, there will be a couch on either side of the entrance and six comfortable chairs, which can serve as the waiting area for students with individual tutoring appointments. The front desk will be staffed by two student workers who will ensure that students are swiping into the center and act as additional supports to students visiting the center. Additional resources available to students
will be reading materials and extra copies of textbooks that have been provided by professors, all of which can be found on the bookshelf by the Math Learning Lab. There will also be one two-door supply cabinet with extra office supplies and materials that can be used during appointments (pens, paper, dry-erase markers, rulers, etc.). The offices of the Director of Peer Tutoring Services and Assistant Director of Peer Tutoring Services will be adjacent to one another to promote an ease of communication between the professional staff members.

There will be a total of 12 tables (two that fit six chairs and ten that fit four chairs) which can be used for peer tutoring appointments (priority seating) and as student work space when available. Four individual tutoring session spaces will also be available, which operate on a first-come, first-serve basis by tutors holding appointments, and each room has one table with four chairs, a whiteboard, and extra materials such as paper, pens, etc. These individual meeting rooms provide a more quiet space for tutors and tutees during appointments and can make tutees feel more comfortable; anecdotally, as an Economics Peer Tutor for three years at my undergraduate institution, I observed that the tutoring center regularly battled the stigma of being utilized only by “failures” and “unintelligent students,” which often deterred certain students from seeking the necessary help. The meeting rooms in The Tutoring Center, although limited, can help students focus on the session rather than their peers present throughout the center.

As described previously, Cooper (2010) found that drop-in tutoring was an effective intervention for academic performance and persistence, even if a student only visits the center once during a semester, so The Tutoring Center will provide both appointment-based and drop-in tutoring services. Drop-in tutoring will be available through the Learning Labs within the center, which will be staffed by at least one peer tutor during open hours. All peer tutors will be required to host drop-in hours each week in their respective learning lab, with the exception of Foreign Language Peer Tutors. The five lab spaces, designed specifically to provide drop-in support (no
appointments needed), available will be the Business Learning Lab, Computer Science Learning Lab, Engineering Learning Lab, Health Sciences Learning Lab, and the Math Learning Lab. Each learning lab will have six tables that can fit four people each, so each lab can accommodate a total of 24 students (including the tutor) at one given time. These spaces will also have two whiteboards and extra materials such as pens, paper, etc.

Students with quick and/or specific questions can benefit from the drop-in structure of these spaces, as they have the ability to stay for however long or short of a duration during open hours. The Learning Labs also can serve as spaces for study groups to meet such that if they discover they are in need of assistance, a peer tutor is available in close proximity, as echoed in the Bryant University Academic Success Programs (2018). Students utilizing the Learning Labs must be aware that the tutors on duty will need to rotate between all students seeking help, especially during heavy traffic times, so if they are seeking more in-depth and individualized support, it is advised that they schedule a peer tutoring appointment. They also must be aware that tutors are not allowed to help them with specific homework problems or graded assignments, as their primary responsibility is to help students understand content and provide strategies on how to apply that content on their own. During the Tutor Training Day, tutors will receive instructions and strategies for navigating individual tutoring sessions as well as sessions within the Learning Labs. Please see the Student Staff section of this paper (page 32) for more information about peer tutor roles and responsibilities.

The Tutoring Center will be open a total of 51 hours each week, Monday-Thursday from 10:00am-9:00pm, Friday from 10:00am-2:00pm, and Sunday from 6:00pm-9:00pm. The center will need to be accessible to students beyond traditional business hours for students whose mornings and afternoons are consumed by classes, meetings, labs, etc., and opening on Sunday nights will be beneficial for students that have exams or assignments due the following day. For
The center will close Friday late-afternoons and evenings, all day on Saturday, and Sunday afternoons to allow the peer tutors and student workers to have time to focus on their own schoolwork. The center will only be accessible to Merrimack students and will not be open to the public.

**Timeline of Implementation**

The Tutoring Center will have its grand-opening during the second week of classes in the fall of 2019. The Tutoring & Math Center will remain open throughout the academic year of 2018-2019, but to ensure fairness throughout the hiring process, all math-related tutors employed by The Tutoring & Math Center and all subject tutors employed by their respective academic departments will need to reapply for the open peer tutor positions at the new center; because of the limited peer tutor positions available for each academic area, not all will be hired to work in The Tutoring Center despite their prior training and experience.

Concerning the hiring process and training timeline, the position for the Director of Peer Tutoring Services will be posted in January 2019 with a start date of April 1, and the Assistant Director of Peer Tutoring Services position will be posted at the beginning of April with a start date of August 1. The position for the Director role will be posted and filled prior to that of the Assistant Director to provide the Director with input and control over the hiring of all members of their staff. The Director will begin accepting applications for peer tutors and student workers starting mid-April, and candidates will be chosen for the positions at the beginning of May. Staff communication from a Merrimack tutoring office, circulated in April, 2018, emphasized the need for offices to recruit and hire Students Providing Instructional Support (S.P.I.S.) for fall term beginning in late spring. Several benefits from doing so are described within the communication, including the ability for S.P.I.S. to begin working with students within the first week or two of
classes, the opportunity for professional staff to prepare for fall student trainings during the summer months, and the possibility of convincing a student who may be considering transferring to finish their college career at Merrimack by providing them with the opportunity to create a positive impact on their peers through the on-campus job. Regarding the trainings occurring in the fall semester for new tutors, the Tutor Training Day, hosted by the Director and Assistant Director, will be the first Saturday of the fall 2019 semester and will occur during the first Saturday of each academic year for new tutors. Student workers will receive separate training as the necessary job orientation is less extensive, and it will take place during a two hour time block within the first week of classes prior to the center’s opening.

Throughout the course of each semester, peer tutors will rotate and host six workshops for all students that wish to attend, adapted from Connecticut College’s Academic Resource Center (Connecticut College Academic Resource Center, 2018). The first workshop, *Starting the Semester Strong*, will address taking effective notes, the benefits of professors’ office hours, staying organized, and determining helpful resources. The *Project Management* workshop will cover topics including developing timelines, decreasing stress and procrastination, increasing productivity, and determining helpful resources. The *Exam Preparation* workshop, which will take place around the time of midterm exams, will cover strategies for approaching multiple choice, essay, and short answer problems, the benefits and cautions of study groups, and creating study strategies and timelines. The “*Taking Stock* at Mid-Semester” workshop will take place after midterm exams, and peer tutors will discuss self-evaluation, reflection, goal setting, time management, and problem solving. And lastly, the *Managing the Stress of Finals Week* workshop (see flyer in Appendix D) will be the last workshop of the semester, and it will include stress-management and self-care strategies, end-of-semester reflection, and establishing goals for the next academic year.
New peer tutors hired for the fall of 2019 will participate in mandatory bi-weekly trainings during the fall semester and monthly trainings during the spring semester, adapted from the tutor and mentor trainings described by Agee and Hodges (2012); this will be the structure for all new tutors, as applications for new peer tutors will be accepted every spring. Returning peer tutors for subsequent academic years will only be required to participate in monthly trainings. To assess the effectiveness of the center, at the end of each semester, a survey will be sent to all students that visited the center (tracked through ID swiping) at least once. TutorTrac, a center monitoring software utilized in the study conducted by Cooper (2010) to track center usage based on student ID swipes, will be implemented by The Tutoring Center to hold records of students that swipe in for appointment-based tutoring and/or for Learning Lab visits. TutorTrac can also manage each tutor’s daily schedule such that student workers can book appointments for students seeking one-on-one support (TutorTrac, n.d.); a different survey will be sent to students based on the type of tutoring they received for feedback and evaluation purposes.

The month-by-month schedule for The Tutoring Center is as follows:

Table 1. Timeline of Implementation for The Tutoring Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 2019</td>
<td>• Director of Peer Tutoring Services position posted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2019</td>
<td>• Application materials reviewed for the Director position and interviews conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2019</td>
<td>• Final Director candidate chosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer Tutor and Student Worker positions posted and advertised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2019</td>
<td>• Beginning of April:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Director begins responsibilities and on-boarding begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assistant Director position posted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer Tutor Information Session offered for potential applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mid - End of April – Peer Tutor interviews conducted by Director and application materials reviewed for Student Worker positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2019</td>
<td>• First week of May – Peer Tutors and Student Workers chosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Application materials for the Assistant Director position reviewed and interviews conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2019</td>
<td>Flyers posted around campus advertising that starting in September, the center will have a new name, new lab spaces, and all tutors across campus will be in one location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>Final Assistant Director candidate chosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>Director prepares for Assistant Director on-boarding/orientation and Tutor Training day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| September 2019 | Assistant Director begins responsibilities and on-boarding begins  
Tutor Training Day (9am-4:30pm)  
Workshops: Starting the Semester Strong and Project Management  
Tutor Trainings:  
1. Positive and Supportive Communication  
2. Setting Goals for the Tutoring Session: Evaluating Tutees’ Needs |
| October 2019| Workshops: Exam Preparation and “Taking Stock” at Mid-Semester  
Tutor Trainings:  
1. Working with Student Athletes and International Students  
2. Tutoring and Mentoring Students with Disabilities  
   * Guest speaker: Director of Accessibility Services Office |
| November 2019| Tutor Training: Adjusting Tutoring Style to Learning Styles                                                                                                                                         |
| December 2019| Workshop: Managing the Stress of Finals Week  
Tutor Training: Dealing with Difficult Tutoring Situations  
Assessment: Mid-year evaluation completed by student staff; survey sent to all students that visited the center at least once during the semester  
End of semester celebration for tutors and professional staff |
| January 2020| Professional staff: review feedback from evaluations and surveys  
Services begin the second week of classes  
Workshop: Starting the Semester Strong |
| February 2020| Workshop: Project Management  
Tutor Training: Applying Ethical Principles to Tutoring Scenarios                                                                                                                                       |
| March 2020  | NEPTA (New England Peer Tutoring Association) Conference  
Workshops: Exam Preparation and “Taking Stock” at Mid-Semester  
Tutor Training: Avoiding Co-Dependency: Training Tutors Not to Rescue                                                                                                                                          |
| April 2020  | Tutor Training: Sustaining Students Through Crisis and Failure                                                                                                                                         |
| May 2020   | Workshop: Managing the Stress of Finals Week  
Assessment: End-of-year evaluation completed by student staff; survey sent to all students that visited the center at least once during the semester  
End of semester celebration for tutors and professional staff |
The Tutoring Center will be hiring a Director and an Assistant Director of Peer Tutoring Services. A search committee will be formed, which will include representatives from the Academic Success Center as well as several faculty members. As noted previously, the Director will be hired first to enable participation in interviews for both the Assistant Director and the student staff; the Director will begin work on April 1, and the Assistant Director will begin work on August 1. The Director’s primary responsibilities include building upon the Center’s visibility and viability, creating and enacting a vision for the Center, managing the Center’s budget, and supervising one full-time staff member. The Assistant Director’s responsibilities include supervising at least 50 student employees, managing the daily operations of the Center, creating all training materials for student staff, and promoting events at the Center to constituencies across campus. Please see Appendix B for the full Director and Assistant Director job descriptions.
Professional Staff Hiring Process

To apply for the Director and Assistant Director positions, applicants will need to submit a resume, cover letter, and a list of three professional references. Once application materials have been reviewed by the search committee, phone interviews will be conducted, and then selected applicants will be invited for on-campus interviews. The on-campus interviews, in addition to meeting representatives from the search committee, will include coffee or lunch with students such that the students can meet the applicant(s) and provide feedback to the search committee. Once hired, both the Director and the Assistant Director will participate in job orientations to become established within their roles and as staff members at Merrimack (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Director of Peer Tutoring Services Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Type of Event</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Facilitator(s)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Learn</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>ASC Staff Members</td>
<td>1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting/Info Session</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Dean of Student Success and Academic Support</td>
<td>2x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lunch & Learn topics covered: general introduction to Academic Success Center services, history of The Tutoring & Math Center and the rebranding of it as The Tutoring Center, practices/policies of the center and the institution, individual staff members’ roles and responsibilities.

Meeting/Info session topics covered: Director roles/responsibilities, expectations, timeline of activities (i.e. the hiring of the Assistant Director and tutors/student workers, etc.), and TutorTrac tutorial.

Table 3. Assistant Director of Peer Tutoring Services Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Type of Event</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Facilitator(s)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 1</td>
<td>Breakfast meet &amp; greet</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>ASC Staff Members</td>
<td>1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting/Info Session</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Director of Peer Tutoring Services</td>
<td>2x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meeting/Info session topics covered: general introduction to Academic Success Center services, history of The Tutoring & Math Center and the rebranding of it as The Tutoring Center, practices/policies of the center and the institution, ASC staff members’ roles and responsibilities, Assistant Director roles/responsibilities, expectations, timeline of activities (i.e. Tutor Training Day, Student Worker training, center reopening, etc.), and TutorTrac tutorial.
Student Staff

For the first year after restructuring, The Tutoring Center will seek to employ 44 peer tutors as well as six student workers to monitor the check-in desk of the center, totaling 50 student employees. Peer tutors will be required to work a minimum of six hours per week, hosting at least three hours of appointment availability and three hours of drop-in assistance in their respective Learning Labs (with the exception of Foreign Language Peer Tutors). As described previously, there will be five Learning Labs within the center, each of which will be staffed by at least one peer tutor during the regular semester. The following peer tutor positions will be available to begin in the fall of 2019:

- 8 Business Peer Tutors (accounting, finance, economics, management, etc.)
- 4 Foreign Language Peer Tutors (French, Italian, and Spanish)
- 12 Math Peer Tutors
- 4 Biology Peer Tutors
- 4 Chemistry Peer Tutors
- 6 Computer Science Peer Tutors
- 6 Engineering Peer Tutors

Because both business-related majors and health professions were among the top five most popular courses of study for 2016 graduates, The Tutoring Center will need to hire tutors with those specific specialty areas for individual appointments and drop-in sessions within the Business Learning Lab and the Health Sciences Learning Lab (Merrimack College Academics, 2018). Merrimack College also offers a computer science major and four engineering-related majors: civil engineering, computer engineering, electrical engineering, and mechanical engineering. Anecdotally, as the Academic Support & Advising Graduate Associate, I have received feedback from students that engineering and computer science are among the most challenging areas of study at Merrimack, so The Tutoring Center will seek to employ tutors in those specialty areas for both appointments and drop-in sessions within the Engineering and Computer Science Learning Labs (Merrimack College Admission, 2018). Lastly, all students at
Merrimack College are required to take a Foreign Language course and two STEM courses, so peer tutor support will be necessary for those areas as well.

To provide additional support to students seeking assistance for a specific course that is not related to the aforementioned tutor specialties, such as Christianity in Context or Introduction to Philosophy, students will be able to contact the Assistant Director and request tutoring for that course. Via email, the Assistant Director will then ask the tutors if any tutors meet the qualifications for adding that course to their specialty list such that they would feel comfortable providing appointment-based support; tutors need a B+ or above as the final grade for any course in which they specialize. The number of courses available for which students can receive appointment-based tutoring will consistently grow. For an example of a peer tutor job description and the necessary qualifications for a student to be employed by The Tutoring Center, please see Appendix A.

**Student Staff Hiring Process**

To advertise the open peer tutor positions, flyers will be posted across campus (see Appendix D) and an information session will be offered in March of 2019 by the newly hired Director; the Director and Assistant Director will host this information session together beginning in the spring of 2020. The session will address the benefits of becoming a peer tutor as well as the roles, responsibilities, and necessary qualifications, and it will also provide a platform for the Academic Success Center to announce the restructuring and reopening of what was previously The Tutoring and Math Center. Flyers will be posted around campus to advertise the open student worker positions as well. The Director will also seek tutor nominations from faculty members and will reach out to the students via email to invite them to apply for the positions.

Students that are interested in applying for the peer tutor positions will complete a Google Form where they will indicate their name, email, class year, major, and the tutor position
for which they are applying (Business, Foreign Languages, Biology, Chemistry, Engineering, Math, or Computer Science). Applicants will also be asked a series of essay questions for which they will type their answers directly in the Google Form, and they will be required to upload their resume, unofficial transcript, and two letters of recommendation from two faculty members at Merrimack College. The essay questions asked will be: Why are you interested in becoming a Peer Tutor? What characteristics/skills do you possess that you believe will make you a good fit for this position? What are your academic strengths? What challenges have you faced regarding your academics, and what steps have you taken to overcome those challenges?

Regarding students who are interested in applying for the student worker positions, they will be asked to complete a similar application, but the essay questions will differ and they will not be required to submit an unofficial transcript or two letters of recommendation. Because these positions are largely administrative, the essay questions will focus on exhibiting customer service attitudes to students that visit the center and implementing effective strategies for staying organized and managing time effectively. Due to the limited time available, student worker applicants will be selected for hire based on the applications; no interviews will be conducted.

Because the start date of the newly hired Director will be April 1, 2019, they will be conducting student interviews after narrowing the pool of applicants. Along with the peer tutor information session, student interviews will also become the responsibility of both The Tutoring Center Director and Assistant Director beginning in the spring of 2020. The interviews arranged will be on an individual basis with the Director and will last approximately 20 minutes. Sample questions that would be beneficial to ask the peer tutor candidates would be: How do you manage your time and balance your coursework? What is your approach when trying to understand difficult course content prior to an exam? How would you respond if you were tutoring a student who was shy and quiet and had trouble articulating specifically what they
were struggling with? How would you respond if a student requested to meet with you just to receive the answers to a set of homework problems? After all interviews have been completed, the Director will decide students to whom they will extend the job offers. Chosen candidates will be notified at the beginning of May, 2019.

**Tutor Orientation and Training**

New tutors will be required to participate in a day-long orientation during the first Saturday of the academic year, and it will take place in the Programming/Training Space within the new center. The orientation will be conducted by both the Director and Assistant Director of Peer Tutoring Services, and several offices will attend as guest speakers including Athletics, the International Student Support Office, and the Accessibility Services Office to provide information on working with students of diverse populations. The learning outcomes of the orientation are:

- Students will have a greater understanding of the center, their roles and responsibilities as tutors and the roles of the professional staff members, and actions that are appropriate and inappropriate during a tutoring session.
- Students will gain foundational knowledge about strategies that can be implemented to build relationship with their tutees, particularly when working with students of diverse populations.
- Students will feel a sense of community and camaraderie with their fellow tutors and with the professional staff members.
- Students will be able to discern the purposes of each campus resource available to students, and when and to which resource it is appropriate/encouraged to refer their tutees.

The schedule of events for the training is as follows:

Table 4. Tutor Training Day Schedule of Events (9:00am-4:30pm)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:45am</td>
<td>Check-in; light refreshments will be served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-10:00am</td>
<td>Breakfast, ice-breakers and community building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-11:00am</td>
<td>Overview of the center, roles/responsibilities of tutors, navigating the Learning Labs, dos and don’ts of a tutoring session – connection to Vygotksy’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-11:30am</td>
<td>Clarifying goals of the tutoring session for tutees; hosting semester workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30-12:00pm</td>
<td>Developing your own tutoring style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:30pm</td>
<td>Overview of campus resources; making informed referrals during a tutoring session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:00pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-1:30pm</td>
<td>Building effective tutor-tutee relationships: conducting the first appointment with a new tutee, using probing questions, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30-2:00pm</td>
<td>Working with specific student populations: student-athletes&lt;br&gt;Guest speaker: Director of Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-2:30pm</td>
<td>Working with specific student populations: international students&lt;br&gt;Guest speaker: Director of International Student Support Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30-3:00pm</td>
<td>Working with specific student populations: students with learning disabilities&lt;br&gt;Guest speaker: Director of Accessibility Services Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00-4:00pm</td>
<td>Breakout - case studies: each group will be assigned a specific tutoring scenario and will identify how, as the tutor in that scenario, to respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00-4:30</td>
<td>Questions/concerns; wrap-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list of materials needed will be:

- Food (44 tutors and 2 professional staff members = 46 total)
  - Breakfast - Dunkin coffee, bagels, munchkins, granola bars, water bottles
  - Lunch - sandwiches, salad, chips from Sodexo
- Orientation manual printed for each student (handout with all slides)
- 7 slips of paper printed, each containing 1 case study (7 total groups)

This orientation is designed with Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development theory as the foundation. When discussing the roles and responsibilities of tutors and the dos and don’ts of a tutoring session during the orientation, it will be communicated to the tutors that their primary responsibility is to help students reach the level of proximal development, the skill sets and mental functions that can be acquired through guidance from more skillful peers (Vygotsky, 1978). During a tutoring session, whether in one of the Learning Labs or during an individual appointment, the tutors are not there to help answer one specific homework problem, but rather to help them understand why the answer is such (concepts) and how the student can get there on their own in the future (process). Tutors are not allowed to help students on any assignments or problem sets for which they would receive a grade, and they need to feel comfortable communicating this to the students; instead, they will facilitate dialogues with students that focus
on understanding concepts, implementing effective learning/study methods and strategies, and incorporating example problems of a similar nature. As Vogel et al. (2007) suggested, “tutors should be encouraged to continue and even strengthen their emphasis on organizational skills and learning strategies, while providing tutees with a sense that their specific, course-related needs are being met” (Vogel et al., 2007, p. 491). This will be a key component of the training to help the tutors understand their roles and responsibilities.

Within the building effective tutor-tutee relationships section of the orientation, the scaffolding component of Vygotksy’s (1978) theory will be applied. This will occur by describing the need to increase the task difficulty throughout the session(s) so that the student can begin to complete and master tasks without additional assistance (Wood et al., 1976). The student will first benefit from hearing and observing the tutor demonstrate the necessary steps, concepts, and reasoning of an example problem, draw a diagram, locate resources, etc., and by witnessing effective methods and strategies, it increases the likelihood that the student can model those actions/behaviors such that practice can occur on a regular basis. Again, relating back to the tutoring session dos and don’ts, the tutors’ primary role is to help guide students in formulating foundational knowledge and reasoning such that they can solve problems in the future without assistance.

Kowalsky and Fresko (2002) suggested that the effectiveness of peer tutoring can be enhanced with the addition of professional consultation from campus accommodations experts. To provide our tutors with such opportunities, the Accessibility Services Office (ASO) will be conducting the session on working with students with learning disabilities during the orientation. Vogel et al. (2007) provided evidence regarding the need for more comprehensive training for tutors on both interacting and working with students with learning disabilities, so the ASO section of the Tutoring Training Day will provide an introduction to strategies for how to learn
and understand the needs of students with learning disabilities and how to establish effective and trusting relationships with these students. It will also address the need for tutors to set boundaries with tutees with learning disabilities, and sufficient strategies to do so, in order to prevent them from developing a sense of dependency on the tutors, an additional suggestion highlighted by Kowalsky and Fresko (2002).

Due to the complexity of the topic and to provide a safe space for further training and an environment where tutors can discuss any situations that arose during sessions with tutees with learning disabilities, representatives from ASO will host a supplemental training for tutors in October, 2019: Tutoring & Mentor Students with Disabilities. This session will involve a group breakout session with case studies and will provide a forum for tutors to ask questions and express concerns to the ASO representatives. This session will also acknowledge the fact that some tutors may have learning disabilities, and without asking or expecting students to disclose that information, it will be framed as a session the primary purpose of which is to provide approaches and strategies for how, as tutors, they can meet the specific needs of this population of students. Because it is not a guarantee that all tutors will work with students with learning disabilities, the ability to attend two in-depth trainings addressing developing an understanding of the specific needs of this student population, common situations that can occur, and setting professional boundaries, as recommended by Kowalsky and Fresko (2002), will provide the tutors with the foundational knowledge necessary to work effectively as tutors with students with learning disabilities.

**Communication and Outreach Plan**

To advertise the restructuring of what was previously The Tutoring & Math Center and the rebranding of it as The Tutoring Center, the communication and outreach plan will encompass emails from the Communication’s Office, flyers posted around campus, tabling at
Involvement Fairs that occur at the beginning of each semester, participation during Merrimack’s Admitted Students’ Days, and posts on several social media outlets including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. During the hiring processes for the professional staff members, the Communications Office will be providing information about the center’s restructuring and grand-opening in September via email. However, once hired, the Assistant Director will manage the center’s general email and will be responsible for communicating to constituencies across campus on a regular basis about programs, workshops, etc. Flyers will also be posted around campus beginning in May, 2019 advertising that starting in September, the center will have a new name, new lab spaces, and all tutors across campus will be in one location (see Appendix D). Additionally, the flyer will be included in the weekly newsletter sent via email to all students by the Dean of Students, titled “From the Dean’s Desk,” during the first week of fall classes.

Because the rebranding of The Tutoring Center will require a cultural shift at Merrimack College, particularly a change relating to language, conversations about the restructuring of the center, in addition to the flyers that will be posted, will need to begin in the spring semester of 2019. Faculty, staff, and administrators will need to become aware of this change such that they can provide the most accurate and updated information to students. The Dean of Student Success and Academic Support will need to present this information at meetings with institutional leaders as well as host information sessions for administrators, faculty, and staff members. The Dean will hold two information sessions during the spring of 2019, where all constituencies across campus will be invited to hear the details about the structural changes and new services available through The Tutoring Center. Further, to provide this information to students during the spring of 2019, there will be one-pagers of information detailing all aspects of the new center spread throughout the Academic Success Center. It will be advertised particularly within the Study Skills courses for students enrolled in the Phoenix Program (academic probation program) and
by Success Coaches within the Phoenix, Compass and Promise Programs, all of which are programs designed to provide academically struggling students with more individualized support, as Grillo and Leist (2013) recommend heavily promoting academic support services to at-risk students to inform them of the resources available. The information will also be advertised within the Sakowich Campus Center, residence halls, etc.

To promote the project that will create more accessible and versatile peer support services to prospective students and their families, the center’s upcoming opening and the new services that will be available will be advertised by the Academic Success Center staff during the spring 2019 Admitted Students’ Days. Furthermore, to advertise the new services available to students once they begin their college experiences at Merrimack, The Tutoring Center’s student and professional staff will participate during the fall 2019 Involvement Fair. Russ (2017) and Grillo and Leist (2013) suggested that it is extremely important to provide students that enroll in the university with knowledge about the available resources early on in their college lives, and the results of both studies describe the vitality of educators encouraging and empowering students to take ownership of their education beginning in their first few weeks of their college careers. Staff participation during the Admitted Students’ Days to promote The Tutoring Center could encourage students to enroll at Merrimack, as it communicates that Merrimack is committed to investing in resources that can enable and empower students to find success. The Director will be hired prior to the Admitted Students’ Days that occur in April, and with the presence of peer tutors and professional staff at the Involvement Fair, both prospective and new students can learn about the services from the individuals that they will see at the new center.

Once The Tutoring Center opens, on-duty student workers will manage the social media accounts. The Instagram username will be @mctutoringcentr; the Twitter handle will be @mctutoringcentr, and the Facebook page will be titled The Tutoring Center at Merrimack.
College. With a new logo created (see Figure 4) and with a strong need for rebranding, swag will be available to students that visit the center, including pens, planners, and pop sockets for cell phones. For sample Tweets and Instagram posts, please see Appendix C.

Figure 4. The Tutoring Center Logo

Lastly, the Assistant Director of Peer Tutoring Services will be responsible for creating visually appealing end-of-semester summaries (infographics) to distribute to faculty, staff, and institutional leaders. These infographics will include semester information regarding the number of tutors hired for each specialty area, the total number of student visits to each lab, the number of individual tutoring appointments held, the workshops offered, and event/program collaborations with other offices across campus. The infographics will serve as important outreach tools regarding the effectiveness and utilization of the new tutoring services provided.

The Tutoring Center Budget

Table 5. The Tutoring Center Operating Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director, Peer Tutoring Services - Annual Salary (fringe included)</td>
<td>$97,371</td>
<td>Median salary – Director of Academic Advising = $73,212 x 1.33 fringe = $97,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director, Peer Tutoring Services - Annual Salary (fringe included)</td>
<td>$73,028</td>
<td>Assistant Director – 25% less than Director = $54,909 x 1.33 fringe = $73,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Staff Salaries</td>
<td>$106,920</td>
<td>44 tutors that get paid $12/hr, working an average of 6 hours a week = $3,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Staff Orientation and Supplemental Trainings</td>
<td>8,844</td>
<td>Tutor Training Day - 7.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(44 tutors x $12/hr x 7.5) = $3,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student worker training - 2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(6 workers x $11/hr x 2) = $132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semester tutor trainings - 9 one-hour sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(9 x 44 x $12) = $4,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total = $8,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Supplies</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food/Sodexo Catering</td>
<td>$1,880</td>
<td>Tutor Training Day – 2 meals (breakfast and lunch) for 44 tutors plus 2 professional staff = $1,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$500 for food/snacks throughout the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total = $1,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing &amp; Photocopy</td>
<td>$1,350</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings/Conferences</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>Registration fees, travel, food, and lodging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TutorTrac Software</td>
<td>$3,200</td>
<td>$2,500 for software plus $700 annual fee; $700/yr thereafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swag</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>Branding - pens, planners, pop sockets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>Extra textbooks, tutoring guides, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iPads and Tech. Equipment for student staff on duty</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>Tech. materials for tutors that are on duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total budget</strong></td>
<td><strong>$301,093</strong></td>
<td><strong>Budget for the first fiscal year of center’s reopening</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most significant expense of The Tutoring Center will be the student salaries, as employing 44 tutors is crucial to supporting the goal and mission of the center. The center is designed to provide students with access to subject tutors in a variety of academic areas during all open hours, which requires having tutors available for both the Learning Labs and appointments, as well as student workers present at the front desk, for the 51 operating hours every week. As noted previously, Russ (2017) detailed the importance of institutions designating a greater amount of funds towards employing peer tutors rather than professional tutors, as it was found that tutoring offered by students who are similar in age, grade, or academic level to the tutees will increase the effectiveness of the program.
Additionally, employing two full-time staff members that are dedicated to providing comprehensive academic support to all undergraduate students will be necessary in order to manage the high traffic of the center and to supervise the staff of 50 students. Regarding the salaries of the professional staff, the Director of Peer Tutoring Services will receive a salary of $73,212, as that is the median salary of a Director of Academic Advising (Academic Advising Director Salaries, 2018). Adding 33% for fringe benefits, the Director’s total annual compensation package will equate to $97,371. As the salary of an Assistant Director is typically 25% less than that of the Director, the salary of the Assistant Director of Peer Tutoring Services plus 33% fringe benefits will be $73,028. The annual compensation for The Tutoring Center’s professional staff will total $170,399.

During the first year of the center’s official opening, there will be 44 tutors employed that are compensated at $12/hour. Each tutor will be guaranteed at least three hours of work, as that is the minimum number of hours that tutors are required to work in their respective Learning Labs, and they also need to have at least three open hours each week for appointments. They are not guaranteed compensation for the individual appointments because if a student does not book an appointment for a particular hour, the tutor will not report for work. Working under the pretense that all 44 tutors will receive compensation for the six hours of work per week (though tutors are able to request more hours), the minimum compensation for tutors during the 30 weeks of the academic year will be $95,040. Six student workers will be paid $11/hour, and each will work at least six hours per week. For 30 weeks of the academic year, the minimum compensation will be $11,880 for student workers. A total of $106,920 will be required for 30 weeks of student salaries, not including time spent in training.

Both tutors and student workers will be compensated at their respective hourly wages for the orientations and supplemental trainings throughout the year. Tutor Training Day will require
seven and a half hours of compensation for tutors (totaling $3,960), and the student worker orientation will be two hours (totaling $132). Additionally, tutors will be required to complete nine 1-hour training sessions throughout the academic year (totaling $4,752). A sum of $8,844 will be required for student staff orientation and training compensation. These expenditures will be carefully monitored and assessed regularly to determine the need for adjustments based on the usage of the center. As mentioned previously, the usage and effectiveness of the center will be analyzed through mid-year and end-of-year evaluations from students that visited the center and from student staff.

**Conclusion**

In summary, peer tutoring services at colleges and universities can improve students’ academic performance and persistence towards graduation, strengthen the retention efforts of the institution, and promote the cognitive development of students with learning disabilities. It can also help students alleviate academic stress, frustration, and confusion by providing them with more comprehensive learning opportunities. With the trainings and experiences that accompany campus jobs as peer tutors, tutors can also experience benefits, as helping other students academically can enhance their confidence in their own learning abilities, higher level thinking capacities, communication skills, and knowledge of effective study strategies.

The Tutoring Center developed for this project will offer drop-in tutoring through the five Learning Labs as well as appointment-based tutoring. Forty-four tutors will be hired during the first academic year of operation with specialties in areas such as biology, chemistry, engineering, computer science, math, and foreign languages. Two new professional staff members will be hired whose primary responsibilities revolve around ensuring that all undergraduate students are being provided with the most effective peer support for their courses. Because of the numerous benefits that peer tutoring can have on both tutors and tutees, it is especially important for the
tutoring services that are offered to be easily accessible, inclusive of a wide variety of academic areas, and heavily promoted to students early on in their college careers. By establishing The Tutoring Center at Merrimack College, the comprehensive support that is currently provided for math-based courses through The Tutoring & Math Center would be expanded such that it can offer peer support for non-math-based courses as well. Converging all campus tutoring activities to one location within the Academic Success Center would help foster the help-seeking behavior of Merrimack students, as they would be more willing and more easily able to access support that can strengthen their academic abilities and therefore their academic success.
References


Grillo, M. C., & Leist, C. W. (2013). Academic Support as a Predictor of Retention to Graduation: New Insights on the Role of Tutoring, Learning Assistance, and


Success for Postsecondary Students with Learning Disabilities. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 40*(2), 35-44.


Business Peer Tutor
On Campus Student Job, The Tutoring Center

Position Type               Desired Class Level(s)
On Campus Student Job       Sophomore, Junior

Description
Business Peer Tutors in The Tutoring Center will be responsible for providing supplementary content instruction and support for all students seeking assistance in business courses (accounting, finance, economics, etc.). Business Peer Tutors will meet with students in both individual and group settings through appointments or lab drop-ins to help with course content and study strategies. The goal of all peer tutors is to enable students at Merrimack College to become independent learners such that they can develop the skills required to succeed both in and out of the classroom.

Business Peer Tutors will attend required trainings and meetings throughout the fall and spring semesters. Students considering a role as a Business Peer Tutor must complete additional application materials and receive 2 faculty member recommendations.

Roles/Responsibilities
Business Peer Tutors will:
• Work a minimum of 6 hours per week throughout the semester with the exception of finals week (additional hours available upon request)
  o Host a minimum of 3 lab hours per week in the Business Lab, working with students on a drop-in basis
  o Have a minimum of 3 available appointment hours per week to meet with students that request business course-related tutoring on a one-to-one basis
• Record individual tutoring session information (notes) immediately after each session
• Attend the Peer Tutor Training day on Saturday, August 31st, 2019
• Attend all biweekly trainings throughout the fall semester (6) and monthly trainings throughout the spring semester (3)

Qualifications
To be considered for the role of a Business Peer Tutor, students must:
• Complete the Peer Tutor application
• Have a minimum GPA of a 3.4, as evidenced by a submitted transcript
• Receive letters of recommendations from 2 Merrimack faculty members
• Have received a B+ or higher in the courses to be tutored (these courses constitute each tutor’s list of specialty areas)

Email the Assistant Director of The Writing Center to apply. Applications are accepted each spring semester for positions to begin in the fall.
Appendix B

Director, Peer Tutoring Services
Full-time, The Tutoring Center

Position Overview:
The position reports to the Dean of Student Success and Academic Support and is responsible for managing all peer tutoring activities as part of the Academic Success Center. The Director must demonstrate advanced administrative support and coordination for multiple programs and projects, be able to represent The Tutoring Center at various campus events, programs, and initiatives, and provide comprehensive student-usage reports to institutional leaders at Merrimack College.

Roles/Responsibilities
- Supervising one full-time staff member
- Assisting with the planning and execution of the Tutor Training Day during the first Saturday of every fall semester
- Building upon the Center’s visibility and viability
- Managing and monitoring the Center’s budget; preparing expense and budget reports
- Creating and enacting a vision for the center
- Collaborating with Academic Success Center units on initiatives supporting retention, persistence, and support of all students at Merrimack College.
- Coordinating meetings and preparing agendas, presentations, and meeting materials to institutional leaders
- Identifying methods and projects to improve the Center’s effectiveness
- Developing action plans to address complex problems
- Contributing to the overall success of the Academic Success Center by performing all other duties and responsibilities as assigned

Qualifications
Required:
- A Master’s degree in higher education administration, college student personnel, or another related field
- 5-8 years of related experience
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Knowledge of student development theories, academic coaching models, student persistence, and retention data/assessment practices
- Experience leading and managing a large and diverse staff
- Ability to present to a variety of constituencies (student, faculty, administrators, parents) in an engaging and informative manner

Preferred:
- Earned doctoral degree
- Budget management experience

To apply, please apply online with a cover letter, resume, and a list of 3 professional references.
Assistant Director, Peer Tutoring Services
Full-time, The Tutoring Center

Position Overview:
The Assistant Director supports the Director, Peer Tutoring Services in managing the flow of work through The Tutoring Center by performing complex and diverse tutors. The Assistant Director will be responsible for all training, managing, and supervising of 50 student employees, monitoring center usage through TutorTrac software, and writing monthly and quarterly reports for institutional leaders. The Assistant Director will manage the day-to-day operations of the center.

Roles/Responsibilities
- Supervising 50 student employees
- Creating all training materials for student staff
- Conducting the Tutor Training Day during the first September of the fall semester as well as biweekly/monthly tutor trainings
- Building upon the Center’s visibility and viability
- Promoting events at the Center to constituencies across campus (students, faculty, administrators)
- Assisting peer tutor staff with the creation of workshop materials
- Collaborating with Academic Success Center units on initiatives supporting retention, persistence, and support of all students at Merrimack College.
- Identifying methods and projects to improve the center’s effectiveness
- Developing action plans to address complex problems
- Contributing to the overall success of the Academic Success Center by performing all other duties and responsibilities as assigned

Qualifications
Required:
- A Bachelor’s degree in a related field
- Ability to multi-task, prioritize assignments, and meet deadlines in a demanding, high volume work environment
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Ability to present to a variety of constituencies (student, faculty, administrators, parents) in an engaging and informative manner

Preferred:
- Master’s degree in higher education administration, college student personnel, or another related field
- 3-5 years of related experience
- Experience with TutorTrac software

To apply, please apply online with a cover letter, resume, and a list of 3 professional references.
BRACE YOURSELF

NEW SEMESTER IS COMING

mctutoringcentr: Don’t worry, we’ve got your back! Stop by to see our new center today and meet the friendly faces that are here to help you succeed!

mctutoringcentr: Our 40 peer tutors are here to help you through every phase of the semester! Be on the lookout for information about our workshops too!
Appendix D

The Tutoring Center presents:
Managing the Stress of Finals Week Workshop
Date: Wednesday, December 4th, 2019
Time: 4:00-5:00pm
Topics addressed will include:
Stress-management strategies, self-care, end-of-semester reflection and evaluation

The Tutoring Center is Hiring!
Peer Tutors & Student Workers
We are looking for tutors in:
- Business
- Foreign Languages
- Chemistry/Biology
- Math
- Computer Science
- Engineering
We are also looking for students to operate the check-in desk during operating hours.
Please contact the Academic Success Center at 978-837-5278 or asc@merrimack.edu for more information
Join us for...

THE TUTORING CENTER
GRAND RE-OPENING

A NEW NAME: All tutors now in one place!

DATE/TIME: Monday, September 9th @ 10am
LOCATION: Third Floor, McQuade Library

COME SEE OUR NEW LAB SPACES!
- Computer Science
- Math
- Engineering
- Business
- Health Science

NEW SEMESTER HOURS:
Monday-Thursday: 10am - 9pm
Friday: 10am - 2pm
Sunday: 6pm - 9pm

Refreshments provided all day!