

Utilizing Speech Language Pathology Praxis to Equip Communications Centers in Supporting Students with Communications Disorders: A Research Study in Progress

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College students have many concerns when first arriving at school. Who will be my roommate? How will I make friends? Are my classes going to be harder than they were in high school? For persons who stutter, these questions are often intensified. Persons who stutter may also have to take on a new role of self-advocacy now that they are independent from their family or friends they had in high school. For these students, social situations, presentations, and classroom participation can seem increasingly challenging, especially without the needed support in place.

Through my time with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) Speaking Center, I have watched students gain skills and newfound confidence in their communication, but there is still much work to be done in terms of supporting students who have communication disorders and differences. What would happen if the phone rang and someone asked “what accommodations or support do you have for students with communication disorders?” Many consultants may want to help, but yet feel unprepared to answer this question, and provide support for students with communication disorders. During my work as a graduate assistant at the UNCG Speaking Center as well as my coursework in the UNCG Speech-Language Pathology master's program, I have begun to research the impacts communications centers can have on

persons who stutter (PWS) or those with other communication disorders or differences. I identified several strategies communications centers can adopt to benefit PWS. Within this article, I will review relevant literature and discuss the importance of this partnership, and how its practice can benefit everyone's college experience. I will also give some ideas that can help this partnership grow, and explain the path for further research.

Stuttering therapy proponents Yaruss and Tichenor (Tichenor and Yaruss, 2019) surveyed PWS about their own lived experiences. When asked how they would describe stuttering, participants identified many different affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects to stuttering. From an outside perspective, one may only see stuttering, but on the inside, the person may be dealing with thoughts and feelings such as embarrassment, fear, anger, or anxiety. This internal turmoil may cause a PWS to avoid certain speaking situations, limiting their ability to form relationships, participate in the classroom, and branch out to try new things. During such a transitional and transformative time as college, support for these students' communication skills are imperative, and it is important for communication center administrators to seek ways that the communication center can provide said support. More specifically, administrators need to understand why advocacy is important for the students

that these communication centers serve.

In identifying ways that higher education career counselors can best support PWS, Walker and Mayo (2015) discuss the importance of collaboration between speech therapists and career counselors. According to their survey results, many PWS believe that their stutter stands in the way of them achieving certain job titles and positions. 70% of PWS agree that stuttering decreases one's chance of getting hired or promoted, over 33% of PWS feel stuttering interferes with their job performance, and 20% of PWS have turned down a job or promotion because of their stutter. If a communication center's overall goal is to prepare students for communicative success after graduation, we must also be equipped to prepare *all students*, including those with communication disorders and differences.

To combat these negative statistics and improve support for students, Dr. Walker and Dr. Mayo suggest a partnership between Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) and career service centers on college campuses. During speech therapy sessions, SLPs may target several communication objectives, working towards preparing clients for a multitude of possible communication situations. One area that is targeted by many SLPs is presentations because many PWS experience negative thoughts and feelings similar to those previously mentioned. Communication centers are primed to intervene in this learning objective since a majority of students who come through the centers are working on presentations for their public speaking courses. Thus, through a partnership between communications centers and SLPs, PWS could feel even more confident and competent in their communication skills, which is the

ultimate goal for us at the UNCG Speaking Center.

To create this partnership, communications centers should branch out to all students, not just those required to take a public speaking course during their first year. Within these consultations, the communications center can provide information to the student if they disclose their experience with a communication disorder. In return, a university clinic could have direct dialogue with the communications center, and recommend that their students make an appointment with the communications center before presenting in class or in scaffolded sessions over the course of a semester. Consultants could work with PWS to practice their presentations, offer mock job interviews for students about to enter the workforce, or provide public speaking anxiety sessions for students that experience communication apprehension. These supports can positively impact a student's communications skills, and better prepare PWS for success after graduation.

With this information under my belt, my work as a graduate student is to find the ways communications centers can create this partnership, and discover the tools and information that consultants need to be successful. I have started this journey by surveying consultants, and found they have so many questions and are eager to work with these students. Through this process, I learned that the key tool is to educate consultants about communication disorders so they will feel more confident when providing feedback to speakers. In addition to educating consultants, our communications center has begun creating a faculty relationship between the Communications Studies and

Communication Sciences and Disorders departments. Our next goal is to interview persons who stutter and ask them how communications centers can better support them on our campus, and provide this information in a training to our consultants. This information will be shared with other communication centers so that every communications center is equipt and confident in their ability to work with these students.