

PLANNING A TUTOR TRAINING PROGRAM

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Designing and implementing, or even revising, a tutor-training program for a particular academic setting requires planning. Particularly, the initial planning stage seems important in order to form practical, sequential, and appropriate training goals and objectives. Further, a sound training plan usually produces a strong training program that can be reasonably easy to implement. It is so very important to understand that tutor-training programs vary greatly from institution to institution, and that this variety is the direct result of each program trying to complement the host institution's own philosophy and personal resources. Because it is critical that each program planner understand that *there is no one, right way to train tutors*, beginning trainers may want to consider the following questions:

Do the tutors really need training?

If you are wondering whether or not your tutors really need a training program (whether certified by College Reading and Learning Association – CRLA — or not), appreciate the fact that the majority of tutors enjoy and look forward to training opportunities, which usually inspire a sense of community and the sharing of ideas and experiences. The implementation of training does often enhance a program's credibility and provides rewards for both training staff and for the program tutors. However, sometimes staff members are hesitant to develop or actually institute a tutor-training program, simply because they worry about whether or not the proposed program will be “good enough.” Dwelling upon trying to choose the absolute best, most appropriate tutor training topics is perhaps an issue for all of us —.but it is certainly not the primary issue. No matter the

unique structure or specific content of the proposed program, it is of primary importance just to realize that our tutors in general do look forward to professional development opportunities, just as we do. Simply starting a tutor-training program will be a rewarding experience for all involved. Most of us involved in tutor training understand and accept the fact that tutor-training programs are constantly undergoing a renewal or revision process as useful improvements are often added continuously.

If I elect to do training, how much training do the tutors really need?

Many tutoring programs do offer both formal and informal tutor training opportunities. The CRLA tutor certification program offers the option of three levels: Level 1, Regular; Level 2, Advanced; and Level 3, Master. Each CRLA level requires a minimum of 10 hours of tutor training in conjunction with some general tutor hiring and tutor evaluation guidelines. It is very true that there are wonderful tutors who have never had any formal training; in fact, the trainer may be one of those tutors herself. Therefore, the decision as to whether to pursue more than one level of training or even to offer CRLA training at all often realistically depends upon the stability of the program's tutor population. It is often common for programs with built-in institutional reasons for high tutor turnover rates to favor the offering of one or two levels, whereas most four-year institutions often have the advantage of having more time to offer more levels. Other fringe factors to be considered include program staffing resources; staff background and experience, space, time, and budget. Trainers interested in following the CRLA tutor training guidelines usually appreciate the enormous flexibility of CRLA topic suggestions, recommendations for presentation modality, hiring practices, and tutor evaluation systems.

How should the tutor-training topics be sequenced?

Most program coordinators and tutor trainers prefer to simply select and order the presentation of topics on a “need to know” priority basis. Keep in mind that operational topics are usually to the forefront of a training program and topics that require more tutorial experience are usually left towards the end of the training program.

Who should manage the tutor training program?

The answer to this question varies. Although in many tutoring programs it happens that the tutor coordinator automatically becomes the tutor trainer, anyone associated with the tutoring program could take the lead in this area. Choice may be also influenced as to whether or not the program tutors are housed and/or managed separately or by specialized academic groups.

Who should actually deliver the tutor training?

Some programs involve cooperative efforts by several program staff members and some programs find advantage in deferring most actual training sessions to other college faculty or staff with more appropriate expertise. The choice of training topics may well be also modified in the future depending upon the tutors’ reaction to each training session. Although a trainer may be very knowledgeable and experienced, the option of involving outside speakers provides variety. Some programs incorporate appropriate audiotapes or videotapes to further complement the mix. It is also common for more experienced tutors to assist in the delivery of the tutor-training program.

How should the training program be scheduled?

How a program coordinator chooses to schedule tutor-training time is largely dependent upon what works naturally in the institution’s specific circumstances. Factors to

consider involve the trainer's availability, tutors' availability, scheduling preferences and program modality preferences. A good place to start is by checking the tutors' schedules and then matching best times to trainer availability. The program coordinator will want to consider general scheduling preferences such as whether to offer the training over, say, a condensed two day session or whether to spread out training opportunities in small, one hour increments. Although most training programs likely move the tutors through a training sequence "lock step," it is also possible to simply offer a rotational schedule of training topics. Further, although many programs offer a traditional "class-like" modality, it is also possible for some trainers to integrate special projects, video or online options so that tutors may access part of the training independently. Multi-level tutor training programs are often scheduled to offer tutors the completion of one level of certification per semester, although this is certainly not the only option.

How does a trainer deal with tutor absenteeism from training?

When a tutor misses a tutor training session, it is often a challenge for the trainer. If the training program is CRLA certified, the requirement is for the tutor to experience the minimum of 10 hours of training per level. Therefore, all missed training should be made up. Some trainers will sit with the absent tutors later and conference the make-up time individually. Some trainers keep records of needed topics and provide special make-up training sessions at the end of a training program. Trainers have been known to videotape their own classes or to provide alternate choice of projects or videos to the absent tutors in place of the missed session. It is important, however, to urge attendance at sessions, as a more passive, isolated modality should not become common for any of the tutors. In fact, the International Tutor Certification Program (ITCP) committee recommends that non-group

training sessions not exceed 40% (4 of 10 hours) of the time devoted at each level of training in order to give each tutor a true sense of community.

What is the most common challenge facing tutoring program coordinators seeking CRLA certification?

In a word: documentation. The ITCP program evaluators are not judgmental. They simply check to see if the proposed program seeking certification clearly meets all specified CRLA requirements. Therefore, be sure to include sample handouts or other appropriate evidence of the existence of the program, especially to validate lesson topics. It is also very helpful if the program narrative is as explicit as possible in order to give the outside evaluator a true picture of how the proposed tutor-training program operates in the context of the organization. Once CRLA certification is received, certification renewal is a process at designated intervals. Further assistance is available from volunteer ITCP evaluators who also act as mentors.