In a large articulated language program, the question is always how to meet the needs of the students and instructors who have different learning and teaching styles. The Teaching and Learning Centers (TLC) at The Ohio State University (OSU) Department of Spanish and Portuguese integrate Tutoring, Conversation, Writing, and Mentoring Centers into one successful unit that services over 8,000 students and 90 instructors a year.

For the students, the TLC supports and enriches the undergraduate classroom experience through free walk-in tutoring, instructor-guided conversation tables, and expert writing help. Here, students acquire skills and apply Spanish and Portuguese to situations that are useful in a classroom and for daily living, a job, or travel. For instructors, the Mentoring Center enriches the professional development of instructors who are committed to helping their colleagues foster student learning.

The TLC is celebrating over a decade of successful service. In the 1990s, instructors served five contractual office hours per week. These hours were poorly utilized because student needs often did not coincide with their instructor’s availability. In 1999, a small 6’ x 6’ office became the first Tutoring Center staffed by instructors during one of their office hours. Students found help in one central location with an experienced instructor on a free walk-in basis. Conversation tables began as informal and randomly scheduled coffee breaks in local eating areas.

In 2000, scheduled conversation tables were added to the TLC as instructors and students became aware of the increased confidence in speaking that resulted from these sessions. In 2003, a Writing Center opened for students in intermediate and advanced classes with a mission to produce better writers, not just better writing. A peer-mentoring program was established in 2004 to address some of the problems that arose from staffing over 100 multi-section language courses with instructors who lacked a foundation in foreign language pedagogy. The mentoring program provided a resource center for instructors with personal attention and support to plan lessons, discuss techniques, and explore teaching strategies.

Growth of the TLC continues as the demand from students has exceeded the language program’s expectations. The comparison of fall, winter, and spring quarters for the past two years shows a steady growth trend that the program expects will continue as enrollments steadily increase.
TUTURING CENTER

“On a scale from 1–10, I give it a 20!!”

“I loved the Spanish Tutoring Center! I can honestly attribute my good grades in Spanish to the TLC (and my awesome teacher).”

“I used the tutoring center . . . every tutor was excellent and they really wanted to help. I also recommended it to other people. Each time I went, I had a great experience. They helped with my homework and tried to explain the concepts to me. I am terrible in Spanish, but when I went I felt more confident. Thanks.”

In the Tutoring Center, students meet with classroom instructors who have experience with course requirements (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, reading selections, oral and written assessments, etc.). Students bring completed homework or work-in-progress to discuss with the tutors. Promoting a sense of collaboration, tutors encourage independent learning by utilizing a wide range of instructional materials and strategies that accommodate a variety of learning styles. By asking the student opening questions, encouraging extended practice of a concept, and observing how the student approaches a task, the tutor can proceed with extended instruction that individualizes skill development.

The tutoring room stays open throughout the day and no appointment is necessary. The instructors serve in 60-minute blocks beginning at 7:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and Friday until 4:30 p.m. Having a TLC open at convenient hours means that busy students may use the services as soon as they need help. Depending on frequency of use and availability of instructors, there may be one or two tutors on duty at any given hour. Schedules indicating class-level expertise of tutors are displayed outside the Tutoring Center and on the department website (sppo.osu.edu/tlc)—which also provides strategies for self-help in reading and writing, listening, and conversation.

Although the tutoring room is small, the Center has an open and inviting ambience with two window walls, colorful paint, and bright posters. Conveniently located on the same floor with department offices, the room includes:

• several tables for computers, phone, a CD/cassette player/radio and workspace plus two tutoring stations where students and tutors sit side-by-side.
• a small file cabinet between the tutoring stations, with dictionaries in easy reach of both tables.
• copies of the textbooks and workbooks used in the elementary and intermediate classes.
• white paper and containers with pencils imprinted with the TLC website.
• a log book to register student attendance and their e-mail addresses to facilitate client feedback requests at the end of the quarter.
• a bulletin board displaying schedules for all the TLC areas (Tutoring, Conversation, and Writing Centers) and other information.
• a wall clock.
• bookshelves with a wide range of textbooks and resource materials.
• TLC brochures with general information available outside the door.
• colorful signs with hints and suggestions for tutoring.

Hints for Tutoring

• Encourage students to be specific about their needs.
• “Coach” the process rather than just providing the correct responses.
• Actively engage students. Remember, students learn by doing.
• Keep the pencil in the student’s hand. Homework and writing assignments must reflect the student’s, not the tutor’s knowledge.
• When students feel hopeless, guide them through an activity that will restore self-confidence.
• Maintain a positive, friendly atmosphere.

Language students come to the Tutoring Center to receive extra help with their class work.
CONVERSATION CENTER

“I like the requirement to speak in the conversation rooms. I liked it and got hooked and go back several times a quarter. . . an awesome idea, and a great way to learn Spanish.”

“The conversation session was great! I enjoyed speaking and interacting solely in Spanish. Attending made me appreciate the language . . . it was free and interesting to simply speak and converse in Spanish. I will definitely look forward to attending the next session.”

“The most surprising part was how good it felt to speak the language and put it to use. There was emotion behind everything said and it felt natural and not forced. The conversation was smooth for the most part and I really enjoyed my group and our great instructor. I’m excited for the next conversation and ready!”

In the Conversation Center, groups of six are guided by a classroom instructor in a relaxed, comfortable setting where students gather around a table and converse. Group size is controlled to encourage participation by all. Sessions are 48 minutes in length, enabling students to discuss themes coordinated with the course curricula in Spanish or Portuguese. Sessions are designated beginning, intermediate, and advanced so that the instructor may engage participants in activities appropriate for each proficiency level. Attendance is not mandatory; however, instructors may choose to require students to attend one or two sessions during each academic quarter.

In these Centers, students develop confidence using Spanish or Portuguese. For example, sessions for playing board games are scheduled several times per week at both elementary and intermediate levels. This is a unique opportunity that focuses on extended conversation practice such as taking turns, interrupting, and making exclamations. As students develop their new skills, they will often become more involved in social, business, and volunteer activities beyond the campus. To support ongoing proficiency, the TLC also welcomes former students who have completed their Spanish or Portuguese language requirement but wish to retain their language skills. Two Conversation Centers are located near the departmental offices. The rooms include:

• colorful posters, maps and signs.
• resource materials, texts, whiteboards, and realia (plastic fruit and vegetables, etc.).
• target language magazines and newspapers.
• board games.
• computer with Internet access.
• a binder with conversation starters and communicative activities organized chapter-by-chapter to reinforce current classroom vocabulary and structures.

Hints for Conversation

• Use only the target language.
• Encourage all students to communicate at their own level and personalize activities.
• Stimulate the students’ involvement in the conversation.
• Select media in advance of the session.
WRITING CENTER

“I used the Writing Center to go over my composition. I only had to wait five minutes to receive very good help. I would definitely go again if I needed it.”

“I used the Writing Center for help and advice on my paper for Advanced Spanish Composition. It was incredibly useful and extremely helpful, and the instructor was very nice and easy to talk to. Revising my papers, I asked numerous questions about grammar to make sure I was using certain verbs and their tenses correctly. I loved coming to the Writing Center!”

“From the very beginning I have been a strong supporter of TLC Writing Center. I encourage my students to use the services provided to them. I know that most of them visit the Center when they write their papers for my class. They find the help they need and appreciate the time and effort the people at TLC Writing put into helping them. It makes my job easier since I can focus more on content more than on grammar. At the advanced levels that is a plus. Students’ writing improves after a few visits to the Center, so I believe that the coaching done there is invaluable to students and professors alike.”

In the Writing Center, composition class instructors serve as consultants. Students may walk in or sign up for appointments. The Writing Center typically serves clients at the intermediate and advanced levels. Students involved in the writing process come with a work in progress. A brochure provides clear expectations for both the Center and the student. This Center has been regularly sponsored by the faculty.

Because of space restrictions, the Writing Center shares a locale with one Conversation Center. The room is scheduled with writing as a priority. In the evening this room is an office for adjunct faculty, allowing for maximized use of limited space.
MENTORING CENTER
The mentoring program supports the university’s mission to provide professionally accomplished instructors who are strongly committed to student learning. It meets two goals: to offer instructors support in practical ways that are useful in the classroom; and to show mentees how to strike a necessary balance between teaching and scholarship.

Four peer mentors, who may be graduate students or adjunct faculty, are selected each spring based upon supervisory reports, student evaluations, and participation in program teaching initiatives. The language program directors and the mentoring coordinator provide an orientation session to train new mentors in collaboration with the OSU University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT). The new mentors practice their roles within the language program by discussing what they will bring to the mentoring program, reviewing the goals and objectives of the language programs, and practicing pre-observation, in-class observations, and post-observation meetings. Mentors also take part in the annual three-week orientation workshop for new instructors in the fall. The mentors’ participation in the orientation identifies them as an integral part of the program. During the workshop, mentors work with the new instructors in preparing practice lessons, observe new instructors as they teach their practice lessons, and help them prepare lesson plans for their assigned first quarter classes. During the academic year, the mentors continue to meet with their assigned mentees on a regular basis to discuss lesson planning, exam correction, and other issues of concern. Annual evaluations of the peer TA mentoring program have been very positive.

“The activities the mentors supplied last quarter were very helpful and you could tell that they were willing to help you.”

“As a new member of [this university], it was great to know that there was someone always there for us. All of the mentors were ready to answer any questions we had.”

“Another positive aspect of the peer-mentoring program was having them observe our classes. It gave us a chance to review our lessons plans with someone experienced. Personally, I got many new ideas that I quickly incorporated.”

“I think it is a fantastic program that should be provided to any new teacher.”

Unlike other TLC shared spaces, the peer mentors needed a private, secure office for individual consultations with their mentees. The Peer Mentoring Center is equipped with:
- textbooks, dictionaries, and pedagogical resource materials.
- a TV/VCR and DVD to view and critique lessons of the mentees. These lessons are an excellent tool for post-observation meetings because they provide a starting point for self-evaluation by the mentees and for suggestions offered by the mentor.
- a computer with Internet connection, printer, and scanner. To share information, peer mentors and instructors in the program use a course management system.
- file cabinets for chapter specific activities.

The Mentoring Center supports language instructors in practical ways that are useful in the classroom.
Making It Work in Your Program: TLC Tips for Success

Other institutions and schools interested in setting up similar programs will want to consider to the following suggestions:

• Meet with interested supervisors and coordinators to brainstorm priorities and create Centers based upon a needs assessment.
• Consider the goals and objectives of the program.
• Write a mission statement for each Center.
• Develop the administrative structure (i.e., coordinators’ job descriptions, scheduling, record keeping, report writing, day-to-day coordination of services).
• Establish a budget for operating expenses.
• Choose the home base for the Center. It may be a university space administered through the dean’s office, dedicated existing offices within the department, or creatively adapted spaces shared with another function. For example, use evening instructors’ offices that are free during the day.
• Prepare, furnish, and decorate the different Centers. Ambience is important.
• Determine how technology can be used to enhance the services offered. Consider use of a course management system to share materials.
• Establish a training workshop for tutors, conversation leaders, writing specialists, and mentors. Involve the university faculty and TA development services when possible.

• Consider and evaluate scheduling possibilities; balance instructor service hours with office hours.
• Log in clients daily with contact information for feedback. Systematize record keeping in all Centers to determine use and collect statistics.
• Construct an evaluation system to gather instructor and student feedback on each Center.
• Share the successes of your Center(s) with your department chair, dean, provost and/or president.

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Further Information


Teachers’ Discovery catalog for posters, games, etc. [www.teachersdiscovery-foreignlanguage.com](http://www.teachersdiscovery-foreignlanguage.com)

The Ohio State University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT) [ucat.osu.edu](http://ucat.osu.edu)