

A History of the First Ten Years of the Speaking Center
at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro:
2002-2012

Evan Zakia
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Author's Note: What follows is the story of the UNCG Speaking Center, written in honor of its tenth academic year in operation, 2012-2013. For the sake of full disclosure, this is also a story in which the author was privileged to have taken a part, first as an undergraduate consultant from 2006-2008, and then as a graduate assistant from 2009-2012. Data, statistics, dates, and events, are all essential elements of the history of any organization, and all are present in this story. However, the author has made a conscious effort to allow the voices of past and present members of the Speaking Center provide the driving force of this history. It is only by listening to the men and women involved in the Speaking Center's everyday operation that readers can truly get a sense of the impact the Speaking Center has had on speakers, on consultants, and in the greater UNCG and Greensboro-area community. Due to the complexity of the Speaking Center's history, this story unfolds in two parts. The first part deals with the establishment of the Speaking Center and proceeds chronologically through the first year of its operation. The second part deals with the following nine years of operation, and is dealt with thematically rather than chronologically. This history concludes with a few final thoughts and looks to the future as the next chapter in the history of the UNCG Speaking Center unfolds.

Part I: The UNCG Speaking Center, 2001-2003

Origins of the UNCG Speaking Center

The UNCG Speaking Center finds its origins in a report from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the accrediting body for the University. This specific SACS report asserts that students need to be proficient in oral communication. Thus, in 2001, Provost Edward Uprichard and Chair of the Communication Studies Department, Bud Goodall, appointed Joyce Ferguson Chair of the faculty committee in charge of researching oral communication programs across the country, deciding upon the guidelines that would suit UNCG, and beginning to train faculty. Ferguson had been teaching public speaking and communication studies at UNCG for many years and had been the Basic Course Director for the Communication Studies Department since 1990. Ferguson, with her extensive background in oral communication, was an excellent choice for the job. *"I appreciated that oral communication enhanced student learning, provided confidence, and was essential to whatever future a student might choose"* Ferguson remembers.¹ Establishing the Speaking Across the Curriculum (SAC) program, of which the Speaking Center would be a part, was the University's first step in fulfilling the vision outlined in the SACS report. Longtime English professor and UNCG administrator, Walter Beale, was chosen to head SAC, a choice Ferguson believes helped to ensure the long-term success of the Speaking Center. *"The presence of Dr. Beale was an enormous benefit. His reputation as a scholar and an administrator opened the gates of opportunity for all that happened. I would never have had the success without his influence and guidance."*² It also helped that Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), which Beale had been instrumental in forming, was already an accepted component of the University. Goodall had also chosen several additional faculty members for the SAC committee who were 'deeply familiar' with

WAC. These developments helped facilitate the establishment and legitimacy of SAC, which would mirror, to a certain extent, its sister program.

With support from the faculty committee, Beale and Ferguson began to explore ideas for what SAC would look like at a practical level by first investigating other universities for models. One university that proved especially informative was the University of Richmond, in Richmond, Virginia. The University of Richmond was heavily invested in oral communication and established a Speaking Center in 1996 when their own accrediting body put forth similar recommendations to those contained in the SACS report. In April 2001, Beale, Ferguson, and Amanda Gunn, Ferguson's research assistant, attended "Excellence at the Center," the nation's first conference of speaking center and communication lab directors. The conference was proposed and hosted by Linda Hobgood, Director of the Speaking Center at the University of Richmond. As a result of what they learned and observed at this landmark conference, Beale and Ferguson told University officials that establishing a speaking center at UNCG was critical to supporting the overall goals of SAC. Impressed with their proposal, University officials green-lighted the establishment of a physical space in the Charles D. McIver building for what would become the UNCG Speaking Center.

The UNCG Speaking Center: Year One

As work proceeded on the center's physical space, Ferguson began the process of training University faculty to implement the other aims of SAC. Part of SAC's responsibilities would be to oversee the institution of speaking intensive (SI) markers for classes in every major offered by the University. Students would be required to take a certain number of SI classes to graduate, and consequently, professors would need to be trained in how to implement and assess SI requirements. In most cases, this involved training faculty in areas they were completely untrained in. Ferguson remembers faculty being initially resistant to the idea of SI markers, and many had never before considered incorporating SI elements like group discussions or public speaking exercises into their classes. Ferguson began to train faculty by facilitating faculty development workshops designed both to inform and to assuage these fears and concerns. Many faculty members attended these workshops, and most started to become comfortable with the idea of teaching SI courses, provided there would be support in the form of a Speaking Center. *"It was the faculty development workshops which really sold the idea of a support center,"* Ferguson remembers.³ A mini-version of these faculty workshops was presented to the Provost and the various Deans and Heads of UNCG's academic departments. The response was uniformly positive, and Ferguson was given the University's full support to implement her ideas. Ferguson: *"I smile when I remember that the Provost at the time looked around the room and said that this was the way every class should be taught... Because the administration was fully behind our program and the Center, Amanda Gunn and I were able to attend the national conventions every year. We saw so many models, but always came away feeling very fortunate. We had something wonderful and everyone knew it."*⁴

¹ Joyce Ferguson, e-mail message to author, February 26, 2012.

² Ibid.

³ Joyce Ferguson, e-mail message to author, February 26, 2012.

⁴ Ibid.

After the hard work of establishing a physical location for the Center and training faculty across the University, the UNCG Speaking Center was finally ready to open its doors to students and faculty for the 2002-2003 academic year. Amanda Gunn was chosen to be the first Director of the Center, who, along with her research assistant Jay Haugen, graduate assistant Jessica McCall (née Delk), and a handful of other part-time student consultants, made up the fledgling staff of the Speaking Center. As with the establishment of SAC, Amanda Gunn and her staff looked to other universities with speaking centers for models when establishing the structure and practices of the UNCG Speaking Center. *"Amanda Gunn had asked me to research every known speaking center in the country,"* Haugen remembers, *"which at the time was not many. The ones that stood out the most were at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana, and at Mary Washington University in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Other than that, there wasn't much to pull from. Amanda and I strategize on how to make UNCG's a ground-breaking and top-notch Center."*⁵ Individualized and group tutoring sessions, they discovered, were a near-universal practice at existing university-level speaking centers and would consequently become the primary thrust and focus of the UNCG Speaking Center in its first year. Working from the basement of the Charles D. McIver building, student consultants would work with 81 speakers during the 2002-2003 academic year. During these individual and group communication consultations, consultants would help speakers with any step of the speechmaking process, from brainstorming a topic to delivering a final speech, from organizing a speaking outline to managing speaking anxiety, and everything in between. One particularly effective tool used during practice consultations was recording a speaker's presentation and then reviewing that recording with the speaker, paying close attention to both nonverbal delivery and the content of the presentation. Student consultants were trained to offer assistance like this by first taking a preparatory training course, CST 390, which was a semester-long communication studies course that focused on peer-to-peer tutoring and public speaking, as well as getting hands-on working experience in the Speaking Center. In fact, part of what makes the Speaking Center so dynamic and unique is the fact that any student in any major can take CST 390 and become a consultant at the Center. Student consultants, therefore, bring various skill sets and specialized knowledge bases to their work at the Speaking Center, which finds its strength in such diversity.

In addition to offering assistance with public speaking and other SI course requirements, many consultants during the first year felt it was important to help transform student attitudes toward the importance of public speaking and the benefits of seeking assistance at the Speaking Center. April Lowe (née Reece), a consultant from 2004-2006, recalls that initially even she herself was skeptical of the importance of public speaking. *"My time at UNCG and at the Speaking Center occurred during the early stages of the institution of the speaking intensive credit requirement for graduation. Many people, including myself at first, dreaded taking speaking intensive classes and thought the requirement was annoying and pointless. However, I was able to witness a transformation in attitudes toward public speaking in so many of my peers and in students across the whole University as a result of the work of the UNCG Speaking Center...I witnessed countless students come into the Speaking Center for the sole*

*purpose of fulfilling a requirement for a class assignment, and thirty minutes later, I saw them leave smiling, confident, and truly appreciative for the valuable skills they had learned."*⁶

The first year of the Speaking Center's existence was indeed eventful, and saw the establishment of peer-to-peer consultations as the Center's signature service, the increasing legitimacy of SI requirements and the Center's role in helping both students and faculty fulfill these requirements, and the beginnings of an expansion into offering additional services. The first year also saw significant personnel change with the departure of Amanda Gunn in May 2003, and the hiring of current Director, Kim Cuny.

Part 2: The UNCG Speaking Center, 2003-2012

Growth and Innovation of Services

Under the guidance of Director Kim Cuny, the UNCG Speaking Center entered into a period of rapid expansion and experimentation in its quest to help speakers become more confident and competent communicators. From its humble first year with 5 student consultants working with 81 speakers, the Speaking Center expanded to a current staff of over 50 student consultants working with over 7,000 speakers a year (with a record high 9,124 speakers in 2006-2007!). The additional positions of a full-time Assistant Director and another part-time Graduate Assistant were established to manage these increased numbers. As the numbers of student consultants and speakers increased, the services the Center offered expanded and diversified. While peer-to-peer consultations remain the Speaking Center's signature service, student consultants began to conduct more interactive communications-related workshops in UNCG classrooms, in their own training facility, and for community partners. Consultants would also be responsible for offering Speaking Center orientations, maintaining and updating online and print tip-sheets, digital tutorials, and various other resources.

Workshops, in particular, place UNCG's Speaking Center on the cutting edge among its peers, offering student consultants the unique opportunity to teach a variety of speaking-related competencies to both undergraduate and graduate-level classes in nearly every major and academic field at UNCG. Workshops are designed not only to teach academic material, but to also allow participants to put into practice the information presented through interactive activities, group discussions, and debriefing sessions. Student consultants have the opportunity to get practical hands-on experience teaching and training while participants have the opportunity to learn and practice new information and communication competencies geared toward multiple learning styles. When workshops were first offered by the Speaking Center in the 2003-2004 academic year, student consultants facilitated 109 workshops reaching approximately 1,900 speakers. Incorporating the latest pedagogical theories and practices, these workshops have covered a multiplicity of topics from managing speaking anxiety to effective interpersonal communication, from guidelines for effective visual aids to facilitating classroom discussion, from mock trial to crisis management interviews and much more. Since the 2003-2004 academic year, student consultants have facilitated a total of 740 workshops reaching approximately 13,323 speakers!

⁵ Jay Haugen, e-mail message to author, July 11, 2012.

⁶ April Lowe, e-mail message to author, July 20, 2012.

While both consultants and speakers continued to mature as communicators, given the increase in staff, speakers serviced, and services offered, the Speaking Center quickly came to the conclusion that it needed a larger physical space. Such a space was secured in the 2006-2007 academic year, following the completion of the Moore Humanities and Research Administration (MHRA) building. The Speaking Center continued to operate out of both the original McIver location and the new MHRA location until 2012, when it secured additional space in MHRA and consolidated its operations there. Following the move, one of the most recent and forward-looking innovations in the services offered at the Center occurred during the summer of 2010, when consultants piloted the first online consultations ever offered by the Speaking Center. Online consultations allow speakers to work remotely with student consultants, via Gmail and Google Chat, on topics ranging from brainstorming sessions, speaking outlines, video reviews and many other related public speaking competencies. Due to its successful debut, the online Speaking Center is poised for significant growth and expansion in the coming years, including the upcoming implementation of Google+ for offering group consultations and workshops to students in online SI courses.

Chris Barton, a student consultant from 2005-2007 and 2011, has been in a unique position to witness and participate in the growth of the Speaking Center from its beginnings to its current state. *"When I first started out at the Speaking Center,"* Barton remembers, *"we had one very small space in the McIver building and one presentation room. Back then, we were very limited by our space and technology; but that didn't stop us from pumping out hundreds of consultations per week... By the time I had graduated and left the Speaking Center, we had expanded over to MHRA... and had even more space and better technology. The new technology was a great help and made things quicker and easier. For example, changing our primary video recording technology from VHS to DVD and then from DVD to Flip Video was huge. The technology and location may have changed, but one thing has always remained constant - the people."*⁷

Impact on Speakers and Consultants

Whether facilitating workshops or conducting consultations, student consultants knew they were making a difference at UNCG, and since public speaking is a process that requires continual practice, consultants inevitably became better speakers themselves in the course of helping others. *"I met a lot of great people at the Speaking Center,"* Maria Lao, a consultant from 2008-2010, remembers, *"and I was very happy to help and guide students in their speech delivery skills. I was able to overcome my greatest fear, and I held hands with many students that we were able to help at the Speaking Center as well."*⁸ Like Lao, Laura Perry (née Schule), a consultant from 2006-2008, experienced significant public speaking anxiety before she joined the Speaking Center. Perry remembers, *"When I joined the internship class (CST 390) to work at the Speaking Center, I had really bad speaking anxiety."* However, thanks to the support of her classmates and the skills she was learning, she was able to manage her fears and *"even volunteered in one presentation to give an example of an impromptu speech... the fact that I volunteered was a huge step for me and a source of pride in how far I had come!"*

⁷ Chris Barton, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

⁸ Maria Lao, e-mail message to author, July 28, 2012.

Once Perry became a consultant, one of her first assignments was to speak to a UNCG class about the resources the Speaking Center offers. Despite her anxiety, she spoke well and was equally well received by her audience, which happened to be a graduate-level class. *"After this experience,"* she remembers, *"something inside me really 'clicked.' Public speaking was not only not that scary, but I could do things even when other people thought it wouldn't be possible!"*⁹ April Lowe also remembers the confidence she gained at the Speaking Center, especially the impact the workshops she facilitated had when offered to new departments on campus. *"I was able to be a part of some of the first workshops to take place in certain departments at UNCG, including Business Administration, Public Health, and Exercise and Sports Science. We even facilitated workshops for some graduate-level classes. It was so humbling and empowering to be able to teach skills to people sometimes twice my age, or to people that were specializing in a field that I could never hope to understand."*¹⁰

While consultants felt empowered by their work and were able to manage their own public speaking anxiety, speakers found their time at the Speaking Center to be equally beneficial. Ron Williams, a consultant from 2004-2007, remembers the confidence speakers gained from making an appointment at the Speaking Center. *"I had the opportunity to see others around me improve their confidence in delivering speeches. My time in the Center included helping many freshman students taking Intro to Communication Studies (CST 105), ESL students, and young children at a Boys and Girls Club. Students often left with more confidence, and if I ran into them on campus, they reported back that the speech went well thanks to our help."*¹¹ Chris Poulos, an Associate Professor and current Head of the Communication Studies Department, believes strongly in the benefits his students receive from visiting the Speaking Center. *"I have had numerous students in speaking intensive classes go to the center to get help with presentations... I can almost always tell the students who have been in and been coached against the students who have not practiced at all. There's a sharp difference between the two. So I think it's clearly a very effective service for students."*¹² For Amanda Sosebee (née Lawing), a consultant from 2005-2008, what was particularly memorable about the work she did was not only what speakers learned from her, but also what she herself learned from speakers. For example, *"one of my favorite groups to work with was the Interior Architecture (IARC) students,"* she remembers. *"I got excited when I knew they would be coming through each year. I always loved helping people with speeches specific to their major because I learned things that I never would have otherwise."*¹³

Speaking Center Committees

Another important aspect of the work consultants perform at the Speaking Center is the committee. Center committees provided an important vehicle for consultants to reach out not only to each other, but also to the rest of the UNCG community. When a prospective consultant joins a CST 390 class, he or she chooses to join one of several

⁹ Laura Perry, e-mail message to author, July 27, 2012.

¹⁰ April Lowe, e-mail message to author, July 20, 2012.

¹¹ Ronald Williams, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

¹² Chris Poulos, UNCG Speaking Center Testimonials, "Faculty Voices," UNCG Speaking Center, <http://speakingcenter.uncg.edu/testimonials/index.php#faculty>

¹³ Amanda Sosebee, e-mail message to author, August 2, 2012.

committees within the Speaking Center. Along with CST 390 students, these committees are comprised of other student consultants, and led by a committee head, also a consultant. Each committee has different responsibilities, which ensure not only the smooth running of the Speaking Center, but also spearhead the Center's campus outreach efforts. Some examples of current and past committees include Publicity, Faculty Relations, Sustainability, Group Cohesion, Consultant Recruitment, and Center Beautification. Committee members are responsible for discussing and implementing ways to fulfill the goals of that particular committee. The Publicity Committee, for example, is tasked with publicizing the Speaking Center and the services it offers in the UNCG and Greensboro-area community. One of the ways it fulfills this charge is by publishing a bi-annual newsletter, which is important in keeping readers up to date on the latest initiatives, services, and developments at the Speaking Center. The Publicity Committee has also recorded public service announcements for UNCG's radio station (WUAG 103.1 fm), posted flyers around campus, set up information tables, created library displays, and various other related projects.

Bridgette Dix, a consultant from 2004 to 2006, remembers her time on the Center Beautification Committee where she helped foster a sense of community among the Speaking Center's large staff. *"We had committees that we also served on as consultants. At first, I served on the Center Beautification Committee. We handled the stars that everyone filled out for each other, and that clients could fill out for consultants, with encouraging messages or as thank you notes. We often gave stars to graduating consultants as something to remember their time at the Speaking Center by."*¹⁴ Dix would later move to the Consultant Recruitment Committee, which she would lead as a committee head. *"After that, I led the recruitment committee. We took recommendations from CST 105 professors and sent out letters to potential consultant candidates. Also, there was a box that a consultant could check on the consultation form if they thought a client would make a good consultant. We sent out invitation letters to those people as well."*¹⁵ As such, the Consultant Recruitment Committee was responsible for the growth and maintenance of the Center's staff.

Amanda Sosebee served on the Center Beautification Committee with Dix, and would later lead the Group Cohesion Committee. *"Before I was a manager, I was on the Center Beautification Committee. We colored advertisements to post around campus and decorated the bulletin boards in the McIver hallway. As a manager, I was in charge of the Group Cohesion Committee. There was another committee for planning social gatherings, so we just wanted everyone to like their jobs and each other. I announced the consultant of the week, which I named the 'CoW,' and for a while I found little cow gifts for them (normally stickers or something goofy). We also reminded people to give meaningful stars to one another, and we posted "weekly inspirations" in the online e-meeting. Sometimes it was a quote or advice, but I always tried to find fun websites, like online coloring pages, to have people take a minute to not be stressed about school and work."*¹⁶

Like Sosebee, Kiya Ward, a consultant from 2006-2009, fondly recalls her time leading the Faculty Relations Committee and acknowledges its influence on the way she

performs her current job. *"Thankfully, I had the opportunity to work on several major projects with the Center. The first one was leading the Faculty Relations Committee. I coordinated a small group of students who wrote thank you notes to faculty and staff members who supported the Center. At the time it didn't mean much to me, you know- why we had to write the notes, but it is something that has stuck with me and that I actually require my freshman to do now. Whenever we have a speaker, they hand write a thank you note. Etiquette means so much and takes you such a long way."*¹⁷ The Faculty Relations Committee is one of the major reasons the Speaking Center has such a positive and collaborative working relationship with many UNCG faculty members.

Committees are also responsible for fostering a sense of unity among the numerous employees of the Speaking Center by hosting potluck dinners, bowling tournaments, secret-Santa gift exchanges, various fundraiser competitions, and other team-building games and events. Training sessions, like Team Quest, which involve participation by the entire staff, are not only informative but help consultants build a team identity as they work cooperatively on training exercises. Chris Barton is certainly not alone when he says that he is *"still in touch with many co-workers and was able to form some very strong friendships."*¹⁸ In many instances, consultants have formed friendships that have endured well beyond graduation. Candy Lassiter (née Lapan), a consultant from 2006-2008, remembers: *"Working at the Speaking Center was such a wonderful experience for me. One of the most memorable aspects of the job was the people that I worked with. Through training, working together, participating in Team Quest, and having many group activities outside of just working, I grew close with my coworkers and built amazing relationships. When I was at the Speaking Center, I served as the leader for the Group Cohesion Committee. The Group Cohesion Committee was a wonderful way for us to build great relationships, which I believe made us work better as a team. I think the atmosphere in the Speaking Center was one of comfort such that all the people who worked there felt comfortable asking for help and work together as a team."*¹⁹

Kiya Ward remembers the strong relationships consultants formed with each other, and ultimately how becoming a part of the Speaking Center team helped her become a more outgoing individual. Staff outings and gatherings were important in that process. *"During my first year at the Center, there were several staff outings. We would often go to Tate Street. At that time, I was an extremely shy freshman so I spent most of the time trying to smile and admire the close-knit staff that had developed. I didn't know how they had gotten so close, but I knew I wanted to grow into a relationship like they had. Everyone just meshed so well and all the older consultants were such AWESOME public speakers. Not only were they great public speakers, but they were all leaders in organizations on-campus outside of the Center- I loved that. To me, the dynamics of the staff were really cool. As my time progressed at the Center, I became a part of that close-knit team and considered my fellow staff members family. We supported each other, encouraged each other, and many of us became very close friends even outside of the Center."*²⁰ Ward also remembers the collaborative way consultants worked together, learning from each other and becoming better consultants as a result. *"Whether we were*

¹⁴ Bridgette Dix, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Amanda Sosebee, e-mail message to author, August 2, 2012.

¹⁷ Kiya Ward, e-mail message to author, August 2, 2012.

¹⁸ Chris Barton, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

¹⁹ Candy Lassiter, e-mail message to author, July 28, 2012.

²⁰ Kiya Ward, e-mail message to author, August 2, 2012.

eating animal crackers together, learning about technology, planning a workshop, or working on a project that was written on the white board in the back, we relied on each other to keep each other busy and teach each other the things that we needed to learn. The thing is, each of us was constantly learning or constantly teaching....ALWAYS."²¹

Community Partnerships

While on-campus services expanded and became increasingly sophisticated, and the Center's physical space grew, the Speaking Center simultaneously developed its off-campus outreach efforts, forming partnerships with local communities and organizations. Beginning in 2003-2004 academic year, the Speaking Center, with the help of Director Cuny's numerous contacts within the Greensboro-area community, began to establish partnerships with various community organizations. The primary goal of these partnerships was not only to help community members become more confident and competent communicators, but also to pursue social justice by engaging in what communication scholar Lawrence Frey refers to as 'applied communication activism.' Frey challenges scholars of communication studies to move beyond an exclusive focus on academic communication theory and practice, and encourages such scholars to use their knowledge, instead, to identify and critique social injustices within their own communities. The ultimate goal of such an approach is to begin engaging in applied communication activism, which Frey defines as using communication theory and practice to "intervene directly to assist groups and communities to secure reform."²² Frey observes, "a social justice sensibility entails a moral imperative to *act* as effectively as we can to do something about structurally sustained inequalities."²³ With Frey's call to action in mind, in 2003-2004, the Speaking Center formed partnerships with 11 different community organizations including, The Association of Retarded Citizens of Greensboro (ARC), Girl Scouts of America, Western Guilford High School, the Interlink Language Center, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Triad Storytelling Circle. In time, and with further motivation and direction from Frey's keynote speech at the 2008 Excellence at the Center Conference, the Speaking Center would form partnerships with numerous other organizations including especially productive partnerships with Joseph's House, a Greensboro-area shelter for homeless high school men, the Interactive Resource Center (IRC), Guilford County's only homeless day center, and the HIVE, a collectively run not-for-profit community space located in the historic Glenwood neighborhood of Greensboro. With all community partners, the Speaking Center works collaboratively with members of that organization to identify their specific goals and implement communication theory and practice to help realize these goals. For example, in order to support the IRC's mission to "assist those who are homeless, recently homeless or facing homelessness reconnect with their own lives and the with community at large," student consultants simulate mock job interview sessions for IRC guests to get hands-on practice interviewing for jobs in real world scenarios. By recording these simulated interviews,

consultants are able to playback the videos and discuss with guests both the verbal and non-verbal strengths of the interview, as well as areas for practice and improvement. These interview-simulation consultations, in conjunction with the IRC's larger job skills training program, have helped many guests secure employment, shelter, and financial independence. Opportunities like these have also exposed students to community issues and inequalities that often remain invisible from within the confines of the University. These partnerships have helped us grow as a Center, as student consultants, and as engaged citizens, and have provided an opportunity to affect real change and work toward achieving social justice in the Greensboro community. As Director Cuny and Hemalatha Yarragunta (née Naidu), Assistant Director from 2009-2011, note, "our communication activism initiatives find UNCG moving from a model of service *for* the community to one of serving *with* our community in a joint effort to make a change in the social order."²⁴

For many consultants, community partnerships were one of the most memorable aspects of their time at the Speaking Center, and many enjoyed working with community organizations to help achieve that particular organization's goals. In 2003-2004, consultants volunteered with the ARC of Greensboro, one of the Speaking Center's first ever community partners. Consultants' efforts included interviewing people with disabilities who were ARC clients, writing short speeches from these interviews, and then teaching the speakers to present their speeches themselves. Several speakers would eventually advocate for themselves and the ARC of Greensboro by presenting their speeches in the community. Andrew Strickland, a student consultant from 2003-2004, recalls, "*One memory which stands out in my mind was our partnership with the ARC of Greensboro. The ARC wanted us to coach two of their clients, both of whom are adults with a developmental disability, in public speaking skills. At the end of the project, these two individuals were able to express themselves through public speaking. The confidence that these speakers felt at the end of our time together was palpable. As a professional advocate for people with disabilities, I'm reminded of that confidence in my everyday work.*"²⁵ For Strickland, his experiences with the Speaking Center and at the ARC would ultimately help influence his choice of career.

Like the ARC, the Speaking Center's ongoing partnership with the Interlink Language Center has proven especially fruitful, not only for the program's international students learning English an additional language, but for Speaking Center consultants as well. Ron Williams views his time with Interlink students as a unique opportunity he may have missed had he not been a consultant at the Speaking Center. "*Working with the ESL students has definitely been a highlight of my time in the Speaking Center. I think I did the Mock Trial Workshop no less than one hundred times for ESL students, which is fun to share now that I'm in law school! It was always rewarding to see the student participation at the end of the workshop. Working at the Speaking Center gave me the opportunity to work with a group of students I would have never had the opportunity to meet.*"²⁶ Like Williams, Kiya Ward remembers the Speaking Center's partnership with Interlink as a unique opportunity to meet new people, and like Strickland, one that

²¹ Ibid.

²² Lawrence R. Frey, "Across the Great Divides: From Nonpartisan Criticism to Partisan Criticism to Applied Communication Activism for Promoting Social Change and Social Justice," in *Social Justice and Communication Scholarship*, ed. O. Swartz (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 44.

²³ Lawrence R. Frey, W.B. Pearce, M.A. Pollock, L. Artz, and B.A.O. Murphy, "Looking for Justice in All the Wrong Places: On a Communication Approach to Social Justice," *Communication Studies* 47, (1996): 111.

²⁴ Kimberly M. Cuny, and Hemalatha R. Yarragunta, "Communication Activism: A New Model of Outreach in the Communication Center," in *Communicating Activism Pedagogy*, eds. L. R. Frey and K. M. Carragee (Cresskill: Hampton Press, in press), 10.

²⁵ Andrew Strickland, e-mail message to author, July 30, 2012.

²⁶ Ronald Williams, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

ultimately influenced her career choice. "While I had several memorable consultations, there were a few that stuck out- those with Interlink students. These were students who were learning English. This was one of my first experiences working with international students so closely...and this is actually where I gained my passion for International Studies, and why I got my Masters Degree in International Public Relations. Working with these students required IMMENSE patience, but the rewards were priceless, especially the looks on their faces when they 'got it.'"27 Offering consultations to Interlink students was also a rewarding experience for Amanda Sosebee. "It was great to have appointments with international students," she remembers, "because all you had to do was chat with someone about anything that was interesting, and yet you knew you were helping them be more comfortable with what they had to face every day."28

Sosebee also remembers working with kids at the Boys and Girls Club in Greensboro. "One of the special projects that I organized was a storytelling class for the kids at the Boys and Girls Club down the street...The volunteers did a great job. At the end of the semester, we had a storytelling presentation with the staff. The kids got up and told their stories, then Kim Cuny and several of the staff members shared stories. The kids realized that it was fun, that they weren't as scared as they thought, and that they had more stories to tell. At the end of an hour, everyone had had fun, and I think the kids were more confident because of it."29 Ron Williams was also involved with the Boys and Girls club project during his time as a Speaking Center consultant. Williams fondly recalls forming a particularly strong bond with one of the kids there, and witnessing his transformation during the course of the project. "Giving back to the community was one of the best parts of my time in the Center. Watching those students at the Boys and Girls Club build their confidence still brings smiles to my face. Zildjian, a kid cleverly named after the drum company, would give us a hard time while we were over at the Club. By the end of our time there, I missed him the most. Seeing him take interest and join in after the initial pushback made the experience most memorable for years to come."30

April Lowe was also involved in organizing a project for the Young Writer's Conference being held at UNCG. Lowe feels that community partnerships were one of the most important aspects of the Speaking Center. "One great thing about the Speaking Center is that it is not just confined to UNCG. I remember several awesome opportunities we were given as consultants to impact the community. Several of us created workshops for the Young Writer's Conference, which was held at UNCG for elementary school children. This was unusual because most of the workshop presenters were education majors, but the Speaking Center consultants provided new faces to the program, and, with majors from all different fields, had something valuable to teach students about the creative process."31

Academic Conferences and Speaking Center Scholarship

Attending academic conferences and advancing communication studies and speaking center scholarship has been a critical method for keeping UNCG's Speaking Center on the cutting edge of peer-to-peer tutoring competencies, advanced communication pedagogy, community activism and other aspects related to the work performed at the Speaking Center. Beginning with the April 2001 "Excellence at the Center" conference in Richmond, Virginia, representatives of the UNCG Speaking Center have attended every major conference on Speaking Centers since. Director Cuny as well as the Center's various Assistant Directors, Graduate Assistants, and student consultants have presented award-winning scholarship at annual meetings of the National Association for Communication Centers (NACC), the Carolina's Communication Association (CCA), National Communication Association, and at the Lilly South Conference on College and University Teaching. In the fall of 2008, Joan and Pete Allen awarded the first donation of what would become a fellowship to fund undergraduate research at the Speaking Center. These funds helped undergraduate consultants attend conferences and supported award winning research papers. Awards for UNCG Speaking Center scholarship include the Joyce Ferguson Faculty Research Award in 2011,³² and 2010,³³ the Huddy-Gunn Graduate Student Paper Award in 2011,³⁴ 2009,³⁵ and 2008,³⁶ the Bob and Anne Weiss Undergraduate Student Paper Award in 2009,³⁷ and the Mary E. Jarrard Undergraduate Student Paper Award in 2003.³⁸

In addition to keeping the Speaking Center on the cutting edge of scholarship and practice, conferences have provided a unique opportunity for student consultants to gain practical experience presenting at academic conferences. April Lowe remembers the confidence she gained from her experiences attending an academic conference as a student consultant: "I remember Kim Cuny taking myself and a handful of other consultants to present workshops at a professional communications conference in Charlotte, North Carolina. I remember being the youngest people by far, which was awesome for so many reasons. Of course, it gave us a huge confidence boost to think that we had something to teach an audience of mostly communication professors. We were able to share our ideas and spread the word about the awesome things we were doing at the UNCG Speaking Center to representatives of other Speaking Centers from around the region. And most importantly, I feel Kim believed in us and gave us the opportunity to do something so far beyond anything you might expect to do in the average college class or

²⁷ Kiya Ward, e-mail message to author, August 2, 2012.

²⁸ Amanda Sosebee, e-mail message to author, August 2, 2012.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ronald Williams, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

³¹ April Lowe, e-mail message to author, July 20, 2012.

³² Roy Schwartzman, Erin D. Ellis, and Hemalatha R. Yarragunta, "Catering to Customers or Cultivating Communicators?: Reconciling Divergent Perceptions and Roles of Communication Centers" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Communication Centers, Richmond, VA, March, 2011).

³³ Kim Cuny and Hemalatha R. Yarragunta, "Communication Activism: A New Model of Outreach in the Communication Center" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Communication Centers, Greencastle, IN, March 2010).

³⁴ Alyssa Davis, "The Implications of Computer Mediated Communication in Communication Centers" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Communication Centers, Richmond, VA, March 2011).

³⁵ William Bryant, "Critical Perspectives on Group Consultations: Communication Accommodation Theory, Immediacy, and Persuasion" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Communication Centers, Philadelphia, PA, March, 2009).

³⁶ Hemalatha R. Yarragunta, "Feedback, Performance, and Sustainability" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Communication Centers, Colorado Springs, CO, April 2008).

³⁷ Kiya Ward, "The X-Factor: Building Relationships Through Dialogue Within Speaking Center Consultations" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Communication Centers, Philadelphia, PA, March 2009).

³⁸ Lauren Winslow, "University Speaking Centers: Assessing Their Role in Promoting Communication Excellence" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Carolina's Communication Association, Raleigh, NC, October, 2003).

campus job.”³⁹ Many student consultants found the conferences they attended while working for the UNCG Speaking Center memorable because of the opportunity they afforded to talk to peers in other university-level speaking centers and labs around the country. Candy Lassiter recalls, “I helped out with the NACC conference when it was held at UNCG which was an amazing experience as well. I loved getting to see how communication centers from all around worked, to share new exciting ideas, and particularly to see how outstanding our center was. After the conference I really saw that our center was a clear leader in the field.”⁴⁰ In other instances, conferences have helped inspire consultants to pursue new ideas for the Speaking Center at UNCG. Chris Barton remembers, “Several of us had opportunities to attend conferences where we could both learn from others and share our experiences so that others could learn from us. The conference I remember most vividly was a conference that I could not actually attend in Omaha, Nebraska, but rather sent a video presentation for. As a result of this, it really inspired myself and the Speaking Center to step-up our video efforts, resulting in video tutorials and on-line consultations.”⁴¹

Speaking Center Committees have, in many instances, been instrumental in helping secure funding for student consultants to attend conferences. For example, committees were almost single-handedly responsible for securing funding for consultants to attend the 2003 NACC conference at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Mari-inetta Pavlic, a consultant from 2003-2004 recalls: “One of my favorite memories of my internship was raising money for our trip to Mary Washington College for the NACC Conference. We sold many doughnuts to get there and the trip was wonderful. I presented at the conference and saw with my own eyes how important the Speaking Center is to a College.”⁴² Jay Haugen adds, “almost our entire staff was able to go to the conference at Mary Washington through our doughnut fundraiser. Nearly every UNCG student bought a doughnut!”⁴³ After securing funding to attend the NACC through a doughnut fundraiser, Joshua Green, a consultant from 2002-2004, remembers, “we showed up in two vans and took people by surprise. We had the most attendees and the most presentations. We received a lot of positive feedback on the things we were doing at UNCG. It was a proud moment for Kim Cuny and the Speaking Center. Others across the country were starting to take notice of the quality of work we were doing.”⁴⁴

Preparation for Post-Graduate Careers

While the UNCG Speaking Center has been instrumental in helping individuals become more confident and competent communicators, in fulfilling the goals outlined in the SACS’s report, in assisting students and faculty meet SI requirements, and by engaging in transformative relationships with community partners, one of its most critical functions is helping student consultants build a foundation for success in the post-graduate world. Ron Williams reflects on how the his time at the Speaking Center helped prepare him for his job as a political staffer for a local Congressman: “My time in

the University Speaking Center is one of the highlights of my time at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. While employed with the University Speaking Center, I had the opportunity to sharpen my own verbal communication skills. I always considered myself to be solid orator but quickly recognized places for improvement while assisting others. From the time I joined on, I can’t recall a time I wasn’t confident going into an oral presentation. This confidence continued into my work as staff member for NC Congressman Brad Miller. Often times I had the responsibility of delivering prepared remarks to community groups. Less often, I had the opportunity to give “off the cuff” remarks on varying subjects. My time as a consultant gave me the tools to complete my professional speaking task with poise, charisma, and with enough interest to not embarrass my boss.”⁴⁵ Williams remembers too, the ways in which the Speaking Center helped him to develop compassion and empathy for those he works with. “I found that working at the Speaking Center provided applications to many parts of my life. It made me a much more confident speaker, gave me experience teaching in large and one-on-one settings, and made me realize that everyone has anxiety. It also increased my ability to feel compassion for others because I realized that although I may not have a problem with something, that doesn’t mean that someone else doesn’t have a huge problem with it. I really learned empathy working at the Speaking Center.”⁴⁶

Candy Lassiter employs the skills she learned as a consultant at the speaking center with great regularity as she pursues a PhD in Developmental Psychology. “The Speaking Center is a great resource which trains students to be leaders in their fields and provides them with priceless skills that they need to succeed in just about anything they do. My experiences at the Center have helped me to this day to excel in my field. I am currently a graduate student at UNCG pursuing my PhD in Developmental Psychology and have already completed my MA. When it comes to presenting my research at department colloquia, conferences, or to my graduate committee, I have always drawn on the skills that I gained at the Center. I have had many students and faculty comment on my public speaking skills, and I am always sure to credit the Center and the Communication Studies department for helping me to foster those skills.”⁴⁷

Josh Green, currently an Assistant Dean of Students at UNCG, believes he would not have the job he now has if he had not been a student consultant at the Speaking Center. “The Speaking Center allowed me to grow and be confident in my public speaking abilities. I also believe that confidence boils over into life and in the classroom. Having a higher self-esteem and confidence that you can get in front of a crowd, gain their attention, be specific and intentional about what you want them to know and leave them with a lasting impression is powerful. It’s like [you] have this internal checklist in your head if you are called to speak that you always refer to. Kim Cuny deserves all the credit for putting that confidence in us and allowing us the opportunities to succeed. I know I would not have my job if it were not for the Speaking Center. I have to speak with people all day long and I use the tools taught to students every day.”⁴⁸ Like Green, Andrew Strickland attributes his current career success to the skills he obtained at the Speaking Center. “Following undergrad, I went to law school at UNC, and I am now an

³⁹ April Lowe, e-mail message to author, July 20, 2012.

⁴⁰ Candy Lassiter, e-mail message to author, July 28, 2012.

⁴¹ Chris Barton, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

⁴² Mari-inetta Pavlic, e-mail message to author, July 2, 2012.

⁴³ Jay Haugen, e-mail message to author, July 11, 2012.

⁴⁴ Joshua Green, e-mail message to author, July 27, 2012.

⁴⁵ Ronald Williams, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

⁴⁶ Laura Perry, e-mail message to author, July 27, 2012.

⁴⁷ Candy Lassiter, e-mail message to author, July 28, 2012.

⁴⁸ Joshua Green, e-mail message to author, July 27, 2012.

attorney at Disability Rights NC, a nonprofit legal advocacy group. When my experience at the Speaking Center came up during job interviews, the question was always something along the lines of, "wait, why don't they have a speaking center at every school?" I didn't quite have an answer for them because these days, public speaking and interviewing skills are necessary skills in the workforce. Now that I've been in my career for the past five years, I think the one-on-one counseling provided by the speaking center is a necessary service to prepare students for the post-graduate world."⁴⁹ Chris Barton, who followed a career in higher education echoes Green and Strickland: "I am now an instructor for two different Colleges and the work I did at the Speaking Center has been a huge help career-wise. I learned public speaking and interpersonal skills that are essential for my job. Almost everyone I speak with from the Speaking Center is doing exactly what they want to be doing. The mission statement says that our goal is to "create more confident and competent speakers," however, I believe that it also creates more confident and competent men and women to join the workforce."⁵⁰

Conclusion: Looking into the Future

While the UNCG Speaking Center has grown by leaps and bounds since its humble beginnings in the 2002-2003 academic year, it remains poised to continue on its trajectory of innovation and expansion. The Speaking Center has recently joined with the Writing Center and the new Digital Action, Consultation, and Training (ACT) Studio, to collectively form The Multiliteracy Centers. The mission of The Multiliteracy Centers is to "support students, faculty, and staff in their awareness of how multiple literacies (written, oral, spatial, visual, gestural, and multi-modal) impact ways of learning, communicating, and composing." In conjunction with this merger will come an eventual joining of centers into a single location, either in Jackson Library or in another space on campus large enough to house the three Multiliteracy Centers. By coexisting in a single location, the Speaking Center hopes to integrate its consultation services with the other two centers to better support the multi-modal ways individuals communicate. In order to achieve this goal, the Speaking Center plans to add two additional Graduate Assistant positions, and in the fall of 2013, the Speaking Center Director and Assistant Director positions will have Academic Professional ranking, a change that Cuny and current speaking center Assistant Director, Erin Ellis believe, "improves the long term stability of these positions."

However, while many new changes and challenges will need to be addressed as the Speaking Center joins the Multiliteracy Centers, its core focus of helping speakers become more confident and competent communicators will remain the same. Peer-to-peer consultations and interactive workshops, whether in person or online, will continue to be the signature services offered to student, faculty, and community speakers. Speaking Center committees remain central to ensuring not only the smooth running of the Speaking Center, but also in spearheading the Center's campus and community outreach efforts. Current community partnerships remain strong and new partnerships with local organizations will continue to be formed and developed. The Speaking

Center's commitment to collaboration and applied communication activism remains as durable as ever. Academic conferences and undergraduate and graduate research will continue to play an important role in both helping consultants become professionals and in keeping the Speaking Center's practices on the cutting edge. In April of 2013, the UNCG Speaking Center will host the 12th annual National Association of Communication Centers Excellence at the Center Conference under the theme, "reflect, rejoice, and remix." Speaking Center faculty, staff, and professionals from universities around the country will travel to UNCG to share their experiences, innovations, and ideas. While the first ten years of the UNCG Speaking Center's existence have seen the Center make a profound impact at the University and in the community, the next ten years promise to be even more exciting and impactful.

⁴⁹ Andrew Strickland, e-mail message to author, July 30, 2012.

⁵⁰ Chris Barton, e-mail message to author, July 31, 2012.

⁵¹ Erin Ellis, e-mail message to author, April 15, 2013