At the start of the semester we obviously had no way to know we would shift to emergency remote. By mid-February, I could see that we needed to be ready with a plan, just incase.

We had been offering online consultations since before 2010 so we had a good foundation. After three weeks researching and developing a teleworking workflow, I returned from spring break determined.

I was consumed with concerns that others might assume we could not do our work from home and wanting to ensure our student employees would stay employed. I was also convinced that your students would benefit from our one-to-one contact.

We found ourselves on the communication centers leading edge when, on Friday, March 13th, we shifted to 100% online. Two days later we were 100% teleworking.

At this point faculty had one week to shift teaching to online while the university gave students a week off from classes. Our student employees worked that week, learning the new workflow.

I am proud of what we were able to accomplish. So many of our student employees were forced into their childhood bedrooms after essentially being evicted from campus housing. Still they persisted, they showed up, and they supported your students.

At the end of the semester, we have some new things to report and some things that have not changed.

*We published a few manuscripts in Volume 5 of Communication Center Journal.
* We continue to provide all of our consultation support services remotely through the summer.
* We are starting to develop new ways to provide instructional support for the fall should we remain virtual.

The answer to all of those questions is YES!

Activities are less about working together to do something, and more about individual reflection and responses to situations/scenarios. For example, instead of having groups of 3-4 create an outline based off a research article, each person in attendance will be assigned a particular part of an article—introduction, body, conclusion—and as a group, look together at an article (via screen sharing from the facilitator) and jot down/type up the information that belongs in their section.

Students will still receive an audience packet during the workshop (shared with instructor who will share with students) and will have missing information throughout in which the facilitator will write out the missing words on a whiteboard, chalkboard, or on a piece of paper and hold it up to the camera.

Because the times have changed doesn’t mean that we still aren’t doing our best to serve those that are seeking our workshop services. We hope to have even more online services available to you in the fall (should we still find ourselves online) to expand our instructional services. As always, if you would like a workshop, please request one online via our website:
speakingcenter.uncg.edu.

BECOMING A CONSULTANT

Students interested in becoming a Consultant must first complete CST 390. To apply for CST 390 admission, you’ll need to provide proof of a 3.0 G.P.A. or higher, a faculty recommendation letter, and a letter of personal interest that indicates (after you complete CST 390) a minimum of a one-year commitment to a part-time paid position or a one-semester, 90-hour internship (CST 412). Learn more at: http://speakingcenter.uncg.edu/staff/index.php
Wisam Salah will be a first-year MPA student this fall. Wisam was offered the opportunity to join the Speaking Center for the Fall 2018 semester, and he has been part of the University Speaking Center ever since!

Coming into CST 190 (our theory and practice course), Wisam was a Physics major. However, he enjoyed what he learned in the Speaking Center so much that he changed his major to Communication Studies. Wisam’s story is a great example of the impact CST 190 and the Speaking Center as a whole can have on students. He became a full Communication Consultant in Spring 2019, after successfully completing CST 390.

Wisam is a strong tech person in the Speaking Center. He created a fact sheet for the 2019 National Association of Communication Centers Conference which we hosted. He also updated consultants’ bios on the Speaking Center website, and created electronic tip sheets.

During the fall 2019 semester, Wisam was promoted to Managing Consultant at the Speaking Center. In this role he continued his tech work, but also became a main leader within the Speaking Center. Some other activities and roles Wisam took on included coaching adults living at Peacehaven Community Farm, which is a place for adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, going to sections of CST 105, Intro to Communication, to help with persuasive speeches, doing Speaking Center orientations for freshmen, attending the Graduate Research and Creativity Expo, and going downtown to help members of our homeless community write speeches.

Wisam is now doing the Speaking Center internship, CST 412. He is doing the full 180-hour internship, showing his level of dedication. He also continues with his same responsibilities from previous semesters in addition to his internship work. Wisam said that once in-person instruction at UNCG was halted and everything moved online, his activities have been very similar to before, particularly with technology responsibilities.

In the fall semester, Wisam will be a Graduate Assistant, moving up yet another level in the Speaking Center. He will still manage the Speaking Center website and wants to create more videos for the Speaking Center as well. Wisam is also interested in doing more outside the box projects, because of the new challenges they present. Wisam enjoys the close relationships that staff have with each other in the center and that the center ultimately has made a huge impact on his life, both personally and professionally.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM TELEWORKING

When they returned from spring break on Monday, March 9th, our student employees were surprised to see their directors and coordinator testing out a plan to shift our entire operations online. After trying out and tweaking the plan all week, student employees were working 100% online on Friday the 13th. They opened at 9am in the physical speaking center but all appointments were online. No physical foot traffic was scheduled. It was very different.

That would be the last day the staff worked on campus in 2020. By Sunday they were 100% teleworkers. Our graduating seniors shared some of their thoughts on teleworking after the semester ended.

Advice for summer staff
Do not hesitate to ask leadership if you have any questions about procedures and reference the guides developed by Erin, Jenny and Kim frequently to make sure everything is being done correctly! Learning on one another during this time is so important, and just because everyone is distanced doesn’t change the fact that the Speaking Center is Speaking Fam [ly] for life! ~Abigail Thomas

Try to set things up earlier than you would have in the center just in case technology isn’t working. Reach out to your friends and remember to take time for yourself! Sometimes when you’re taking online classes and working from home, it can feel like you aren’t making as much progress or things are slower moving. Remember to talk to your Speaking Fam about difficulties you are having so that we can all support one another. ~Kellar Potate

Challenges we faced
Sometimes it was difficult to communicate things through email or text that would have normally been said in person. To overcome it, I had to be extra aware of how things I said in text could be misunderstood and make sure the instructions I give were clear. I also had to ask for clarification and detailed instructions for certain things that were new. ~Kellar Potate

The learning curve as I mastered the technology needed to move online was a big challenge. ~Steven Garfunkel

It was also hard not being there in person to interact socially with my Speaking Fam, as well as with other friends on campus. To overcome this, I had to find creative ways to check in on my peers as well as actively communicate with people that I would’ve normally seen every day. ~Kellar Potate

Positive takeaways
The inside look I got into other people’s lives – it’s such a unique experience to see how others live at home and even meet their pets and family! ~Abigail Thomas

The support that we’re all able to still give each other was positive. This is a really trying time for each and every one of us in different ways and to be able to have that support system and maintain that close knit nature of our shift families was so crucial in being able to continue business as usual successfully and give our speakers what they need as well as take care of ourselves and each other as consultants.

~Mary Villano
I was forced to become more flexible and think of creative ways to solve problems that came up. I think that while we were in the center, online appointments were often very awkward because I didn’t know how to make the same connection to the speaker through the screen. This experience, I have become a lot more comfortable with not just the technology, but connecting with the speakers we work with through a screen. This could help us in the future when we may have to utilize the internet in our careers. For example, as a future speech therapist, I could use the online communication skills learned in the center to reach people all over the country that would likely not have had access to care in their home cities. ~Kellar Potate

This taught me to adapt to new challenges. I just completed CST 390 [speaking center theory and practice course] in Fall 2019, so I was still relatively inexperienced in the center as a whole when we moved online. As a result of my efforts to meet this challenge head on, I have felt better prepared for other challenges associated with our new normal. ~Steven Garfunkel

OUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Words from our newest student consultants upon completing the Speaking Center Theory and Practice course

Inspiring, Influential. Iconic. For me these 3 words sum up my experience during 390.” ~Kiran Merchant

My favorite memory from 390 was presenting on Halloween, in costume, during a tornado. ~Kellar Potate

My favorite memory is probably how quickly our 390 class became close and how we made a group chat to help each other get through it. ~DeNell Brown

During the Fall of 2019, my favorite memory while in 390 was the shadowing segment of the course. I was able to meet so many wonderful consultants, receive the feel of a professional environment, as well as work alongside with the other 390 students to strengthen my communication skills! ~Nari Beatty