FEATURE ARTICLE

Supporting Online Community College Students With Trained Tutors in a Post-COVID World

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 created unplanned, fully remote educational spaces. One California community college tutor training program augmented their tutor training practices to pivot to meet the needs of students now confronted with fully online learning. Using a mixed-methodology approach (e.g., survey and focus groups/individual interviews) over the course of one year, this program attempted to identify successes and potential gaps in providing equitable online tutoring access and to investigate possible challenges in meeting student affective needs within new, fully online tutoring spaces. Findings indicated clear gaps in student knowledge about online tutoring services, a high level of affective satisfaction with online tutoring, and a demographic mismatch between the proportion of student groups who utilized tutoring services as compared to the proportion who responded to the survey. Ultimately, it was found that tutor training programs need to continue to update training practices to meet the needs of students in a post-COVID world.

Keywords: tutoring, online, training, knowledge, affect

California Community Colleges are a collection of 116 higher education institutions enrolling over 2 million students, making them the largest higher educational system and the largest provider of workforce training in the United States (California Community College Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], n.d.-b). Importantly, students who can successfully complete a degree or certificate within this system can double their earnings within 3 years and make higher annual salaries (CCCCO, n.d.-b). However, according to the California Community College Statewide Student Success Scorecard (CCCCO, n.d.-c), only 48.9% of degree, certificate, and/or transfer-seeking students starting for the first time in 2012–13 completed a degree, certificate, or transfer-related outcome within 6 years. In response to these success rates, over the past decade, numerous community college student support systems have scaled to meet the needs of a diverse student population, including building systems around professional development for community college faculty and staff (CCCCO, n.d.-a).

The focus on professional development is indeed a crucial step to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Teaching experience and teacher training are not requirements for faculty teaching in California community college classrooms; rather, a master's degree or a higher degree in a field is the minimum requirement (Russell, 2012). Consequently, without professional development, some instructors may be underprepared to handle the intricacies of appropriately assisting community college students because the instructors' graduate programs do not often focus on andragogy, and community colleges leave little room "in curriculum [to] consider the difficulties young people might have as they learn to think like a political scientist or physicist or the reading and writing difficulties that can emerge when encountering a discipline for the first time" (Rose, 2012, p. 157). Therefore, community college instructors are often discipline—not andragogical—experts and may become frustrated with not yet knowing how to best support the very students they are trying to teach (Manasse, 2017). In fact, due to the inconsistent preparation of some faculty to equitably assist a wide array of diverse community college students, it becomes paramount to also support the professional development of learning assistance professionals as well. In other words, at all academic levels, well-trained tutors who provide individualized and customized

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student support help to fill in potential learning gaps and improve student success rates (Almassy & Jun, 2020; Kraft & Falken, 2021).

Tutor Training at Our Institution

Supporting the individual and diverse needs of students has become even more important recently as educational researchers have found that the switch to fully online educational spaces created by COVID-19 has impacted students' abilities to focus, led to increased rates of anxiety and depression, and is connected to students of all ages performing worse academically since the transition to remote learning (Hazard, 2021).

Before COVID-19, tutors at our institution were trained to develop both student and their own cognitive and affective learning domains and were also trained to self-develop as educators in four-key areas: tutoring, leadership, andragogy, and equity (Manasse, 2019; Schoenbach et al., 2012). This charge to interact with students as whole people—tending to both their thoughts and their feelings—and to personally develop as educational professionals has helped this program decrease equity gaps and dramatically support student success over a 3-year trend (Almassy & Jun, 2020).

Once fully remote educational spaces were mandated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we decided to update our tutor training to tap into our tutors' lived experiences of learning and tutoring online to help us transform our ongoing and recurring training processes. This included training on how to tutor online, how to normalize the frustration that might come along with learning in a fully online environment, how to deal with technology issues, how to promote the appropriate services for students who may feel isolated/alone/apprehensive due to the pandemic, and how to humanize our online tutoring spaces to replicate the community feel from our in-person tutoring spaces. Our program subsequently became certified in online tutor training by the Association of Colleges for Tutoring & Learning Assistance (ACTLA) to complement our College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) Level 3 in-person tutor training (ACTLA, n.d.; CRLA, n.d.). However, we did not know if these changes to our tutor training had positively impacted students' perceptions of tutoring. In sum, we wanted to investigate if the updates we incorporated into our online tutor training had worked or not.

Therefore, when our tutoring program—along with the rest of the world—was relegated to remote instruction, we decided to reflect upon and investigate how well student cognitive and affective needs were being met not only on campus but also online. This study investigated how one tutoring program within the California Community College system pivoted to meet student cognitive and affective needs in online learning assistance spaces and investigated how we could continue to improve to equitably meet the needs of individual students and student groups in a fully remote environment as well. Consequently, to unveil student perceptions, we created two research questions:

1. How well did our fully online tutoring program meet the needs of our institution's students?
2. What gaps remained with our fully online tutoring program to equitably meet the needs of students?

Background and Review of Relevant Literature

Technology and the use of the internet have become an integral part of the college experience for decades. Daily, students use computers, tablets, and smartphones to type papers, submit work, email instructors, participate in online classes and meetings, conduct research, and practice content. This reality has become even more highlighted with the global COVID-19 pandemic, when most college classes and learning resources have been designated to fully online platforms, deepening gaps, challenges, and disparities between the demands of the educational system and the educational reality of thousands of students (Ed Trust-West, 2020). In fact, 15% of the students nationwide did not have access to the technology they needed to continue pursuing their education online when the pandemic started, 45% of the college students in California were not keeping up academically, and 31% reported having limited or no access to the academic resources normally available on campus (Ed Trust-West, 2020). Sadly, this is not a new finding. For years, traditionally underrepresented groups of community college students have experienced technological inequity, which has only been exacerbated by the global pandemic (Cullinan et al., 2021). Consequently, the move to fully online instruction due to COVID-19 highlighted that successfully passing a class, completing degrees and certificates, and ultimately acquiring/advancing in a job had become a technological arms race with students beginning at different starting lines but expected to finish the same race at the same time. Combine this technological inequity with the fact that faculty sometimes lack the andragogical preparation to support the academic development of a diverse student population in the ways of how to learn, not just what to learn (Manasse, 2017), and it then becomes no surprise that students sometimes need additional, individualized support not only on what to learn and how to learn but also how to learn online. And this is where tutoring and how to appropriately train tutors to individually

support students no matter the learning modality come into play.

The Need for Tutor Training

The Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education (CLADEA) policy has attempted to bring multiple higher education tutoring organizations together with a vision to "provide leadership and a unified voice to advance the profession of postsecondary learning assistance and developmental education" (CLADEA, n.d.-a, Mission section) and in its policy statement, emphasizes the issue of educational inequities for "marginalized student populations" (CLADEA, n.d.-b, Bullet 5). Ultimately, CLADEA suggested that properly-funded learning assistance centers combined with efficacious learning assistance methodology will improve access to higher education for all students (CLADEA, n.d.-b). Further, a meta-analysis of the field of learning assistance has found that while access to learning assistance can support student success, appropriately trained tutors further strengthen student outcomes:

> [There are] moderate to large effects [on student outcomes] when tutors work with a strong program structure that provides high-quality instructional materials and ongoing training…[and] there is also ample causal evidence that college students can tutor effectively, particularly when following highly structured curricula. (Kraft & Falken, 2021, p. 5)

Additionally, Kraft and Falken (2021) discussed that among other aspects, successfully scaled tutoring programs should provide intensive and ongoing training:

> Tutors/Mentors Receive Intensive, Ongoing Training: Prioritizing tutor training through a combination of initial professional development, peer learning communities, and on-the-job coaching is key to supporting continual improvement. Investments in training will be increasingly important as programs work to scale their supply of tutors/mentors. (p. 8)

Consequently, tutors who are trained to acknowledge and expect varied and idiosyncratic student needs—in other words, that students will potentially have different educational, societal, economical, and/or technological backgrounds than their own—will be better prepared to support the academic needs of students on a one-to-one basis. And while there are, of course, a wide variety of variables that influence and lead to successful tutoring sessions—including the tutor and tutee backgrounds—how students feel about educators and educational settings can impact their ability to learn and feel accepted or that they simply belong within educational spaces (Pacansky-Brock et al., 2020; Rose 2012; Schoenbach et al., 2012; Weigle, 2004). This is especially important to keep in mind for remote learning where "descriptive studies of online programs suggest that relationships are a particularly critical feature for maintaining engagement and that lack of internet and internet-enabled devices can lead to unequal access" (Kraft & Falken, 2021, p. 5).

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Theoretical Framework: Community of Inquiry and Building Relationships with Students

Well-trained educators, then, need to become experts at individually and humanistically supporting the whole person both in person and online, not solely supporting knowledge acquisition, which typically is the focus of classroom time and classroom assessment (Pacansky-Brock et al., 2020; Schoenbach et al., 2012). In fact, fully remote learning—like that necessitated from COVID-19 quarantines—should also focus on the development of positive relationships in order to humanize online education since these spaces have the potential to be isolating and lead to student depression and anxiety (Hazard, 2021; Packansky-Brock, 2020). Consequently, positive, educational relationships become the "connective tissue between students, engagement, and rigor" (Pacansky-Brock et al., 2020, p. 2).

To be clear, fully remote teaching environments that were necessitated by COVID-19 quarantines led to the realization that all educators need continued and ongoing professional learning opportunities to appropriately support the diverse needs of whole students, including their cognitive and affective domains (Schoenbach et al., 2012), both in person and online. Therefore, as we now continue to improve what the professional development of educators might look like in our post-COVID world, we should also continue to develop tutor training to better support students in all possible educational spaces, including online.

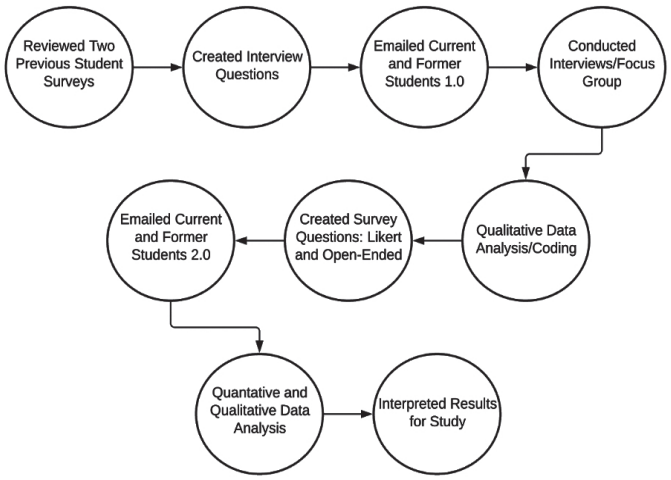
The community of inquiry (COI) framework considers the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning in online spaces and expands them to include three interconnected domains of presence: cognitive, social, and teaching (Garrison et al., 1999). COI, then, creates a clear paradigm of the potential issues fully online instruction creates for students. Specifically, the second core element of this theoretical framework, social presence, has potentially been impacted by fully remote learning environments, and students may be experiencing a lack of joy or inability to find these online interactions personally fulfilling. This concept is of paramount importance as "social presence is a direct contributor to the success of the educational experience" (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 4). Additionally, according to this framework, since any participant in the educational setting may take on the role of the teacher, well-trained tutors are in an ideal position to take on the primary roles of both designer and facilitator of ideal online experiences that welcome the necessary cognitive and social work needed to be successful in remote educational settings. In sum, the role of the well-trained tutor in this framework is to "support and enhance social and cognitive presence for the purpose of realizing educational outcomes" (Garrison et al., p. 5). Therefore, when cognitive, social, and teaching aspects work in unison in remote environments, students may feel that they can bring their true selves to educational spaces, leading to improved online interactions and subsequent student success (Garrison et al., 1999; Hazard, 2021; Pacansky-Brock et al., 2020; Schoenbach et al., 2012). Well-trained tutors, then, who have been trained in theories connected to student affective and cognitive needs, are integral to online student success.

Methodology

In order to answer our two research questions, we chose a mixed-method approach using quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus groups/interviews and survey open-ended questions) following guidance from Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) and Patton (2002). These authors recommended conducting comprehensive and integrated explorations of the data to ensure a holistic framework for the data analysis. By doing so, this methodology provided a way for us to explore the experiences of the respondents through their own lens, as well as to help us understand possible inconsistencies and elucidate ambiguities. We also chose this multi-phased participatory approach to provide students/respondents with a platform to share their experiences and perceptions to identify potential gaps in providing online, equitable tutoring access and tutoring services to students at our institution. Using the information from the participants regarding the identified gaps, we then were able to assess how well our fully online tutoring program met the needs of students. Furthermore, the sequential design supported the analysis of quantitative data through the stories and narratives shared by the respondents.

Once we reviewed the literature and selected a theoretical framework and research methodology, we designed the study. Our methodology consisted of (a) using student feedback from two prior student services and tutoring surveys to create the focus group interview questions, (b) emailing current and former students to volunteer for the study, (c) conducting focus groups and individual interviews with students who volunteered for the study to collect their perceptions on their in-person and online tutoring experiences, (d) designing and administering a survey to collect student perceptions on their in-person and online tutoring experiences. Figure 1 illustrates the sequential process we used in our research design.

Figure 1
Sequential Research Design



Instrument Development for Focus Groups and Survey

To develop our study's instruments, we analyzed two sources of student feedback from two previous surveys, one administered by our institution: *Student Support Services Survey* (see Appendix A), and one administered by our tutoring program: *Post-Tutoring Session Feedback Survey* (See Appendix B). The *Student Support Services Survey* was initiated by our campus and included six closed questions and one open-ended question. This survey was emailed to approximately 3,000 students who were actively enrolled in Spring 2020 or who had previously attended the institution but who were not enrolled at the time of the survey. A total of 309 students responded to the survey. Some salient points from this survey

that emerged included the fact that respondents said the most helpful training for them at the time of the survey would have been Canvas and Zoom; tutoring was regarded as the most helpful service to students entering the Fall 2020 semester; and information that could have helped them the most was information on how to take online courses.

Also, before and throughout our study, our tutoring program implemented a *Post-Tutoring Session Feedback Survey* (See Appendix B). In sum, these questions asked the student to reflect upon and rate a specific, recent tutoring session as well as the technology utilized during that session to support their learning. In the past year alone, these post-session surveys have been sent to over 2,000 students, and we have received over 650 responses. Some salient points from this survey that have emerged included positive feedback on the technology utilized to conduct online tutoring and a continual positive increase in student perception of online tutoring services.

After reviewing data from both surveys and updating our own online training practices, we then developed the instruments for our mixed-method approach. Patton (2002) described the mixed-methods approach for data collection as a means to get insight into the different perspectives of the questions(s) being investigated. This is possible through the implementation of different sources of data collection, in this case, both qualitative and quantitative. According to Patton, data collected from quantitative approaches allows for the researcher(s) to "measure the reactions of a great many people through a limited set of questions" (p. 14), whereas qualitative methods "produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases" (p. 14). Furthermore, Patton states that the mixed-method approach relies on data collected through two distinct instruments: surveys and other similar tools for quantitative data, and the researchers themselves for qualitative data, both of which have been implemented in this research study.

After reviewing data from both surveys, and updating our own online training practices, we then developed the instruments for our mixed-method approach.

Focus Group: Participants, Data Collection

The purpose of the focus group was to give participants the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts about our tutoring services in smaller groups or individually. This format allowed for the researchers to ask open-ended questions to elicit the individual experiences of the participants and their viewpoints as well as expand and clarify with follow-up questions. The groups were created randomly, and participants were given a few options for meeting days and times and signed up according to their preferences.

We sent an email to approximately 3,500 students who had utilized our tutoring services before (some, but not all of these emails were the same emails from the *Student Support Services Survey*, and all of these emails were included in our *Post-Tutoring Session Feedback Survey*) with an invitation to participate in a tutoring focus group on a voluntary basis with an opportunity drawing to receive a gift card upon completion of the focus group sessions (see Appendix C).

Of the approximately 15 students who volunteered to participate, student follow-through resulted in five participants being asked about their overall experiences with both in-person and online tutoring services offered by our program. Also, due to scheduling issues, the focus groups became a small group (one session) and individual interviews (three sessions). Participants included four females and one male. We did not ask the students about their ethnic backgrounds. Three participants started using our tutoring services in Fall 2019, one in Spring 2020, and one in Summer 2020. These semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) were conducted in the Fall of 2020 over the course of three weeks, and all lasted about one hour. The participants were asked about their experiences interacting with staff members and tutors, how welcome and safe they felt both in the in-person and online tutoring environments, their experiences making appointments and dropping in for tutoring, and how they compared the in-person and online tutoring (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis: Focus Groups, Interviews

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Themes emerged, followed by further analysis, and finalized themes were categorized and examined for patterns. The researchers utilized a color-coding system to highlight words and create categories of ideas that were relevant and/or recurrent (Patton, 2002).

Survey Instrument

Based upon the focus group analysis in Spring 2021, we then created and disseminated a comprehensive *Tutoring Survey* with both closed-ended and open-ended questions that was sent to the same 3,500 student participant emails (see Appendix E). Invitations for students to participate in the survey were also posted on social media, our webpage, and the tutoring Canvas page. The survey consisted of 22 multiple choice questions with Likert-scale responses, several multiple-choice questions, and a few open-ended questions, all of which were directly related to the coded focus-group responses and research questions of this study. Ultimately, this survey also allowed us to examine another, deeper layer of analysis: the extent to which the background of a student/student group potentially impacted responses to the survey.

A total of 334 survey responses were collected, which yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. Table 1 details demographics of the *Tutoring Survey* respondents.

Table 1

Tutoring Survey Participant Demographics

Participant characteristic	Percent of respondents
Age range	
18–24	41.3%
25–29	34.1%
30–39	14.1%
40–49	2.1%
Other	8.4%
Gender	
Male	51.8%
Female	44.0%
Non-Binary/Unreported	4.2%
Ethnicity	
White	58.4%
Black/African American	9.0%
Latinx	8.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino	9.6%
Multiple/Unreported	14.6%
Native language	
English	91.1%
Other	8.9%

Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify potential gaps in providing online, equitable tutoring access and tutoring services to students at our institution, as well as uncover possible disparities and challenges in student experiences using our fully online tutoring services that were created by COVID-19 mandates. We initially augmented our tutor training to better prepare our tutors to support the potential emerging, individual needs of students who were now learning fully online, and then collected quantitative and qualitative data that was then analyzed and interpreted within the period of one year. Thereafter, our study intended to ascertain how well our program and tutor training met the needs of students in online tutoring spaces and what gaps remained in meeting those online needs. We coded our findings into three main themes:

- Knowledge: How knowledgeable respondents were about new online tutoring services.
- Affect: How respondents felt about their online interactions with staff/tutors.
- Demographics: How much the background of a student/student group might impact responses to the survey.

Theme: Knowledge About Tutoring Services

For this study, we were concerned whether students would know how to access our new fully online tutoring services or not. Pre-COVID, we were located in our campus's library and promoted our services via outreach to faculty. With the changes that COVID-19 brought, we did not know whether students or faculty would be able to find our fully remote services. Overall, 334 students responded to our *Tutoring Survey*, 74.6% self-reporting as current students at the college and 25.4% as former students. Data revealed that the vast majority (95.2%) of the study participants were aware of the free online and in-person tutoring services offered, and 80.2% learned about these services through a professor, a counselor, a classmate, a tutor, or the Canvas learning management system.

We created an online tutoring hub both on our website and our Canvas shell. To remove a potential knowledge barrier, we worked with our IT department to make the link to online tutoring services automatically available in student Canvas shells so that instructors would not have to opt in to making the link to tutoring services available. This study did not investigate the percentage of campus instructors who may have made the tutoring link unavailable for any reason. However, 22.1% of the study respondents found the tutoring link in at least one of their Canvas shells without being prompted to look in Canvas for access to our tutoring services, and 92.6% of these respondents clicked on this tutoring link. Interestingly, among the open-ended responses on why some of the respondents did not click on the link included the thought that it might not be a safe link to click and that students simply did not know what the tutoring link was.

Data also revealed that 24.9% of the respondents thought it would be helpful to publicize the tutoring services via social media

(which we were doing), and that 15.3% would like to see a link to tutoring services in their online student portal, which has now been accomplished since this study was conducted. Other ways in which respondents said they would like to have access to the services include a link in their Canvas course shells (20.4%) and reminder emails (18.6%), both of which were already happening but of which respondents were unaware, not receiving, or not checking.

Theme: The Affective Domain – How Students Feel About Tutoring

Our program was interested in discovering if students felt just as welcomed in our online tutoring spaces as they did in our in-person spaces. Thus, the *Tutoring Survey* utilized a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = unsatisfied and 5 = very satisfied). Our findings indicated that there was a slightly overall better affective experience with online tutoring versus in-person tutoring. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the data between respondents' in-person versus online affective experience, combining responses at Likert levels 4 and 5 together.

Table 2

Tutoring Survey Spring 2021: Respondents' Affective Experience Using Tutoring Services

Affective qualities	Tutoring format	
	In-Person	Online
Satisfaction with staff interaction Satisfied/Very satisfied	83.3%	95.9 %
Welcome feeling Welcome/Very welcome	78.0%	90.7%
Comfort feeling Comfortable/Very comfortable	85.4%	92.8%

Qualitative data that supported these findings from the *Tutoring Survey* include responses to questions such as:

- "Warm service."
- "Great opportunity—please continue."
- "Online tutoring is very professional."
- "I'm so grateful for the free tutoring that I take advantage of to succeed in my educational career."

The findings from the *Tutoring Survey,* which are similar to the *Post-Tutoring Session Feedback Survey*, demonstrated the following over one year (Fall 2020 through Fall 2021) with online tutoring (*n* = 677 students):

- 92% of the students thought it was very easy/easy to make appointments.
- 91.2% of the students thought it was very easy/easy to use Zoom as a tutoring platform.
- 99.2% of the students were very likely/ somewhat likely to use ideas from the tutoring session in the future.
- 96.6% of the students were very satisfied/ satisfied with their online tutoring session.
- 96.1% of the students were very likely/ somewhat likely to use online services again.

Qualitative data from the *Post-Tutoring Session Feedback Survey* that support these findings include statements from students such as:

- "I recommend the online tutoring service to any student that they need help with their homework. Even though the students have another issue, they can talk to tutoring service and they get help. The online tutoring service is reliable and is at no charge."
- "I like online tutoring, and it is easy to get in access."
- "I had a great first-time experience. I feel comfortable using this service."
- "Once I have gotten the hang of the technical side I felt like this saved me so much more time because I didn't have to drive 30 minutes to [campus] then find parking and walk to the tutoring center! I hope this is kept up even after the pandemic because as with everyone else time is precious. I have 3 kids who are at home doing school and so leaving and going on campus even after the pandemic would be hard because now I'm spoiled that tutoring is just a few clicks away! The screen share was super simple!"
- "I really love the 'waiting room.' The music and the guy who was working the receptionist zoom desk that put me in a breakout room with [staff] was a great character and I'd go back just for the ambiance."
- "Honestly, tutoring through technology can be difficult and frustrating at times, however, you guys make it as hassle free as it's going to get which I greatly appreciate. Thank you for offering this fantastic free resource."

We also investigated the preference of tutoring modality to see if this impacted student affect and ultimately found that there was an even divide in preference, with 46.7% preferring online tutoring, 43.4% in-person, and 9.1% having no preference. Therefore, our quantitative and qualitative data revealed that tutor training helped to meet student affective needs regardless of their tutoring modality preference.

Theme: Demographics

A last category that emerged in this research was respondent demographics. Through thematic analysis, the authors discovered that the background of a student/student group might have impacted responses to this survey. Tables 3 through 6 provide a breakdown of the respondents' self-identified demographic information in comparison with the overall student population at the college and demographics of students who utilized the tutoring program:

Table 3

Age Group: College-Level Data, Tutoring Program Users, and Tutoring Survey Respondents

Survey instrument	Age ranges				
	18–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	Other
College Fall 2020[a]	55.0%	16.0%	12.0%	4.0%	13.0%
Tutoring program Fall 2020[b]	58.1%	14.5%	12.8%	5.4%	9.2%
Tutoring survey respondents Spring 2021	41.3%	34.1%	14.1%	2.1%	8.4%

[a] San Diego Community College – Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (2021a). [b] San Diego Mesa College (2021a).

Table 4

Gender: College-Level Data, Tutoring Program Users, and Tutoring Survey Respondents

Survey instrument	Self-Reported gender		
	Male	Female	Non-Binary/ Other
College Fall 2020[a]	43.0%	57.0%	–
Tutoring program Fall 2020[b]	38.1%	61.6%	0.6%
Tutoring survey respondents Spring 2021	51.8%	44.0%	4.2%

[a] San Diego Community College – Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (2021c). [b] San Diego Mesa College (2021c).

Table 5

Ethnicity: College-Level Data, Tutoring Program Users, and Tutoring Survey Respondents

Survey instrument	Self-Identified ethnicity				
	White	Black/African American	Latinx	Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino	Multiple/Unreported
College Fall 2020[a]	30.0%	6.0%	39.0%	15.0%	10.0%
Tutoring program Fall 2020[b]	28.3%	7.4%	38.9%	17.3%	8.1%
Tutoring survey respondents Spring 2021	58.4%	9.0%	8.4%	7.2%	17.0%

[a] San Diego Community College – Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (2021b). [b] San Diego Mesa College (2021b).

Table 6

Language: College-Level Data, Tutoring Program Users, and Tutoring Survey Respondents

Survey instrument	Native language	
	English	Not English
College Fall 2020	N/A	N/A
Tutoring program Fall 2020	N/A	N/A
Tutoring survey respondents Spring 2021	91.1%	8.9%

Responses included in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 revealed differences among the demographics of the *Tutoring Survey* respondents, the college student population, and students who utilize the tutoring program. For example, when compared to the college-level data and tutoring program data, there seemed to be a disproportionately higher level of *Tutoring Survey* respondents in the white (Table 5) and 25–29 age group (Table 3). Additionally, there seemed to be a higher level of female students who utilized remote tutoring the past year as compared to the school demographics and *Tutoring Survey* respondents (Table 4). Further analysis with inferential statistics would shed more light on the significance of these disproportionate percentages. Lastly, via the *Tutoring Survey*, we were able to ascertain language background information of survey respondents (Table 6). However, we were unable to report the overall language background of students who utilized tutoring or attended the college.

Overall, we needed to be cautious about how we interpreted the knowledge and affect results as it appeared that the proportion of the survey respondents does not consistently closely align with the student population of the institution as a whole and/or the proportion of the students who utilized the tutoring. However, with the amount and type of data that we have now gathered, we can follow up with additional focus groups within specific populations, especially when the feedback received did not fully represent the students

we serve, such as Latinx students, students from specific age groups, and students who may be non-native speakers of English.

Discussion

COVID-19 created completely remote learning spaces for students, and some faculty and students were not prepared to deal with this transition due to a lack of the necessary technology needed to thrive online and/or the training to appropriately teach/learn online. Additionally, COVID-19 has had affective impacts on students, and the educational world has seen an increase in student depression and anxiety (Hazard, 2021). To combat these issues, our tutoring program created online tutor training opportunities to better prepare our tutors to support the individualized and emerging needs of students created by remote learning. To investigate the impact of this online tutor training on student perceptions, we created two research questions:

1. How well did our fully online tutoring program pivot to meet the needs of our institution's students?
2. What gaps remained with our fully online tutoring program to equitably meet the needs of students?

Pivoting: How Our Tutoring Program Met Student Need

As researchers, it was amazing to see that the work we put into training our tutors to support the whole student, especially in our online spaces, apparently made a difference. When we first moved to online tutoring in March 2020, we initially provided tutors with individual Zoom links. After a few months, our tutors reported that they and students felt the very sense of isolation and depression noted by Hazard (2021). Listening to the feedback of students and tutors, we not only provided specific training sessions around humanizing technology, we also recreated communal spaces by removing individual zoom links and creating virtual online tutoring centers where multiple students, tutors, faculty, and staff could interact with one another in real-time.

No matter the work we put into training our tutors, it was still surprising to see that students self-reported such a high satisfaction within our online tutoring spaces and, in fact, were more satisfied with our online tutoring spaces than with our in-person spaces. We also learned that by listening to tutors' and students' trepidation of feeling isolated and alone and then providing tutor training around how to support themselves and others online, we were able to positively support the affective domain of students in our online spaces and even become ACTLA online tutoring certified. Furthermore, we continue to see an increase in the success rates of students who utilize our tutoring services during COVID, just as we did pre-COVID (Almassy & Jun, 2020).

Gaps: How Our Program Can Continue to Improve

Clearly, there was a gap between what we believed students knew about our tutoring services and what they actually knew. For example, students requested access to tutoring information in their Canvas shells, via email, and via social media, all of which were in place while this study was being conducted. On the one hand, this demonstrated that our program and training successfully anticipated where students might search for tutoring services; on the other hand, we discovered the need to continue to improve how we consistently market that these access points exist, especially when students see a link to tutoring, for example, but are apprehensive to click on said link. This may stem from a technological divide experienced by some students, and we should not make assumptions about what students do or do not know about access to online tutoring.

Clearly, there was a gap between what we believed students knew about our tutoring services and what they actually knew.

Also, students mentioned they would like to see a link to tutoring in their district portal. Luckily, we were working on this and have now established this access point for students, again demonstrating that via ongoing conversations with students and tutors, our program does well in learning about and meeting student needs. It is important to keep in mind that even when we provide access points that students prefer, like social media, we may need to do a better job at consistently being active in such spaces. For example, we now have a staff member who is assigned to post about tutoring in our social media spaces more often, and we can supplement this activity with improved training about how tutors can promote and even participate in social media with students.

Next Steps in Research: Student Backgrounds and Tutoring Perceptions

There is a fairly large divide between the number of Latinx students at our institution, the proportion of Latinx students who utilize

tutoring services, and then the low proportion of Latinx students who responded to this survey. This is one of many examples we discovered from analyzing the demographic breakdown of our study participants, campus demographic breakdown, and tutoring program demographic breakdown. In future studies, we plan to specifically reach out to our Latinx community, for example, to ensure they are well represented in any findings. We also noticed that survey respondents ages 25–29 may have been overly represented in the survey results compared to the proportion of students in this age range at our institution and in our tutoring services. Again, we need to be mindful about how we ask for responses from across age groups and work with our campus services to ensure more consistent feedback. We also noticed gender discrepancies among college-level data, tutoring program utilization, and *Tutoring Survey* respondents. Follow-up questions could be asked in future studies about why individuals choose to utilize online learning assistance or not, as the gender data from the past year of tutoring program utilization is incongruent with previous years (Almassy & Jun, 2020). Lastly, we need to know more about the language background of our students and how this might impact student success across the curriculum. For example, in our tutoring program, we certify tutors in English as a Second Language tutoring across the curriculum and are currently developing ways to create multilingual tutoring sessions to support the diverse needs of our students. In other words, we have a sense that many of the students at our institution and within our tutoring program have diverse linguistic backgrounds, but we need more information about how many students that is. Overall, we want to ensure we are fully investigating whether all student groups feel positive about their ability to access and utilize tutoring in our online spaces.

Lastly, we need to know more about the language background of our students and how this might impact student success across the curriculum.

Conducting this type of research while still in the midst of the pandemic was quite eye-opening. We were able to get some feedback on areas we were doing well in our online spaces, and some gaps we still need to fill. Our program was extremely deliberate with training our tutors to become even more welcoming, accommodating, and understanding in our online tutoring spaces. It appears as we move into more and more of a hybrid educational world, we will need to continue to support and develop our tutors as hybrid tutors to equitably support students.

Limitations

Although the researchers for this study created a thorough, year-long, and meticulous approach to gathering and analyzing data, no matter the care the researchers took in creating this study, it should be kept in mind that there are still several limitations. First, this is the review and analysis of students who utilized one program in one community college setting; consequently, it may be considered challenging to generalize findings. Additionally, both researchers' positionality needs to be kept in mind. In this particular study, both researchers are highly involved in the field of learning assistance and education, and these backgrounds impact how we conduct and evaluate educational research.

In addition, the limits of the participants themselves also need to be kept in mind. Students who volunteered to be in the study, both during the surveying and focus group phases, may not necessarily represent the opinions of all students due to differences in educational experiences and/or their cultural backgrounds. For example, the students who participated in this particular study may have felt more positive about learning assistance compared to students who did not. We also experienced unequal participation in our survey by ethnicity, age range, and native language, so generalization of findings to all student subgroups is difficult.

It should be noted that our *Tutoring Survey* was conducted during a time when we only had online tutoring available and that some of the respondents did not ever utilize our in-person services. Although this study was open to all students—even those who did not utilize our tutoring services—it should be kept in mind that many of the students in this study utilized tutoring. Another limitation was that the overall utilization of our tutoring services decreased during COVID.

Lastly, there were some technological and implementation gaps that may have influenced survey results. We conducted focus groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, we were relying upon Zoom for our focus group sessions. Students who participated in live Zoom focus groups did sometimes have technological issues and missed portions of sessions. Additionally, we utilized Google Forms to anonymously survey students. It is possible that some students responded to the survey more than one time since

we did offer an opportunity drawing of a gift card to participate. We also posted this survey on our social media, so it is also possible that someone who was not a student at our institution responded to the survey. Although the researchers did their due diligence to review, analyze, and clean clear outliers, it should be noted that some of our raw data may have duplicative or out-of-group responses.

Conclusion

The past few years, remote learning stemming from COVID-19 isolation has clarified that only providing training and access to in-person services is no longer appropriate in the field of education. We will need to continue to provide space to support our students both in person and online. Luckily, we have already developed the training necessary to support students in one modality or another, but there is potentially a gap to support tutors on how to work across systems simultaneously—moving from an in-person tutor, to an online tutor, to a hybrid tutor—who works both in person and online. Indeed, the more we ask of students—like the need to take classes in a hybrid modality—the more we need to prepare our educational spaces and teams to be trained to support these students.

We can see that our training does well to anticipate student needs in multiple areas (i.e., knowledge and affective domains), but there are still gaps in how we support the 2022 version of the whole student who will no longer reside in a single modality as an in-person or as an online student. If our students need to become more capable of becoming hybrid students, our training and services need to follow suit. In future studies, we will need to define what hybrid learning assistance sessions might look like, implement updated practices, and then reassess how to support tutors and students via an updated mixed-methodology approach to discover: (a) how students feel about the continued professional training of tutors, (b) what students' course-level outcomes look like in emerging hybrid learning spaces, and (c) how to ensure we get a broader range of demographics from survey respondents that better represent our institution and our tutoring program.

We know we want to continue to meet students as whole people, humanistically, and provide students the integrated technology pieces they desire: more ways to access our services, improved social media, time management options, and continued humanized services. Therefore, it seems like a successful higher education tutoring program in 2022 is still in process, and that's just the way it should be: focusing on the journey and not only the result.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix A
Student Support Services Survey

1. To be a successful student in Fall 2020 online/remote learning, training in which of the following would be most helpful? Rank top three.
    a. Canvas
    b. Zoom
    c. My Portal
    d. Student Conduct and Policies
    e. Information on Technology Lending Program (Laptops/WiFi/Webcams, etc.)
    f. Other Specify Below

2. To be a successful student in Fall 2020 online/remote learning, which services would be most helpful for students? Rank top three.
    a. Tutoring
    b. Academic Counseling
    c. Personal Counseling
    d. Career Counseling
    e. Support Services (DSPS/EOPS, etc.)
    f. Other Specific Below

3. To be a successful student in Fall 2020 online/remote learning, which of the following resources would be most helpful for students? Rank top three.
    a. Information on how to take online/remote classes
    b. Information on The Stand (Food Pantry)
    c. Information on Time Management
    d. Information on Childcare
    e. Advice from students and faculty about online learning
    f. Other Specific Below

4. In what manner is it easiest for you to learn about the various services, resources, and trainings [the Institution] offers? Rank top three.
    a. Training videos on a dedicated webpage
    b. Peer assistance and one-on-one online training
    c. Small group online trainings
    d. Modules and information delivered through Canvas

5. If we created a webpage with resources intended to help students be successful in online/remote learning in Fall 2020, what would you want included and easily accessible on the website? Rank top three.
    a. Technology Training Videos (Canvas, Zoom, etc.)
    b. Tutoring
    c. Counseling (Academic and Career)
    d. The Stand (Food Pantry)
    e. Technology Lending Program
    f. Student Health Services
    g. Other Specific Below

6. What do you know now that you wish you knew then about being an online student? Please feel free to comment on things like how long you spend on your classes, how important counseling/tutoring/faculty office hours are, advice for new online/remote learners, etc.

7. What days/hours is it most important for you to have access to a "live" person for help (general questions/tutoring/counseling, etc.)? Rank top three.
    a. Weekday mornings (8am–12pm)
    b. Weekday afternoons (12pm–4pm)
    c. Weekday evenings (5pm–8pm)
    d. Weekend mornings (8am–12pm)
    e. Weekend afternoons (12pm–4pm)
    f. Weekend evenings (5pm–8pm)

Appendix B
Post-Tutoring Session Feedback Survey

1. How would you rate the process for making an online tutoring appointment?

1	2	3	4	5
Very difficult process	Difficult process	Neither difficult nor easy process	Easy process	Very easy Process

2. How would you rate Zoom as a tutoring platform?

1	2	3	4	5
Very hard to use	Hard to use	Neither hard nor easy to use	Easy to use	Very easy to use

3. How likely are you to use one or more ideas from your tutoring session today in the future?

1	2	3	4	5
Not likely at all	Somewhat unlikely	Neither unlikely nor likely	Somewhat likely	Very easy to use

4. How satisfied were you with your tutoring session today?

1	2	3	4	5
Very unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neither unsatisfied or satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied

5. How likely are you to use our online tutoring services again?

1	2	3	4	5
Not likely at all	Somewhat unlikely	Neither unlikely nor likely	Somewhat likely	Very easy to use

6. Who did you work with today? Names of tutors available in alphabetical order.

7. Comments or suggestions about this tutor (Please be as honest and thorough as possible). Your opinion matters.

8. Comments or suggestions about our online tutoring service (Please, be as honest and thorough as possible). Your opinion matters.

Appendix C
Invitation to Focus Groups

1. Email:

2. First Name:

3. Last Name :

4. CSID:

5. How often do you use [our] tutoring services?
Times per semester: 1 2 3 4 5 Everyday

6. About how long have you been using [our] tutoring services?
    a. Since Summer 2020
    b. Since Spring 2020
    c. Since Fall 2019
    d. Before Fall 2019

7. Which tutoring modalities have you used? (Click all that apply.)
    a. On the Floor Tutoring: Worked with a tutor face-to-face inside of the tutoring center or in a building at [Our Institution]
    b. Embedded Tutoring: Worked with a tutor who was in my classroom
    c. Online Tutoring: With [program] tutors in Spring and/or Summer 2020
    d. Online tutoring with NetTutor
    e. I'm not sure
    f. Other

8. Which tutor services do you use? (Click all that apply.)
    a. Writing
    b. Language
    c. STEM (math, science, non-humanities)
    d. Music/Fashion
    e. Allied Health
    f. I'm not sure
    g. Other

9. When are you available to participate in the focus group? A focus group is when you discuss your opinions on a topic with a small group of other people who have experience with that topic. Please select all the dates/times you are available, but you will only attend ONE session. Not everyone who signs up will necessarily be selected to participate. We will follow up with an email to let you know whether you have been selected or not and what day/time to participate.

    a. Tuesday, September 1 from 9 AM to 10 AM
    b. Wednesday, September 2 from 1 PM to 2 PM
    c. Thursday, September 3 from 4 PM to 5 PM

Appendix D
Focus Group Questions

1. Tell us about your experience using the MT2C tutoring (in-person and/or online)
    a. Have you experienced MT2C in-person tutoring, online tutoring or both?
    b. Have you used tutoring for STEM or humanities?
    c. Have you dropped in or made an appointment? Or both?

2. How were these experiences similar and or different?
    a. In-person versus online
    b. STEM versus humanities
    c. Drop-in versus appointment

3. Can you describe a step-by-step from how you found our tutoring services until the end of the tutoring session?

4. How did tutoring help you in your academic journey?

5. What was easy about using MT2C tutoring? What was challenging?
    a. Making an appointment
    b. Finding where to go/how to connect
    c. Interacting with a staff/tutor

6. Any other comments/thoughts you would like to share?

Appendix E
Tutoring Survey

1. Were you aware that [our institution] offers free tutoring?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. To the best of your memory, which of the following ways have you learned about [our] free tutoring services?
   a. Canvas/[Institution] Website
   b. Instructor or Counselor
   c. Student/Classmate/Tutor
   d. Other [Institution] Services (Journeys, EOPS, DSPS, Pathways, Social Media, etc.)
   e. Multiple ways listed above – Please, specify all the ways you learned about [our] services.
   f. Unsure

3. How can we better advertise our services and resources?

4. Free online tutoring has a link in most course Canvas shells. Have you noticed this link?
   a. Yes, at least one of my instructors mentioned it
   b. Yes, I found it myself
   c. Yes, someone else told me about it, for example another student or a tutor, etc
   d. Multiple ways listed above
   e. Unsure
   f. No

5. Have you clicked on the link?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   *If no, can you let us know why you have not clicked on the link in Canvas?

6. Have you used [our] free tutoring services?
   a. No, not yet
   b. Yes, I have used [program] in-person tutoring when we were on campus, including working with an embedded tutor (a tutor in my in-person class)
   c. Yes, I have used [program] online tutoring, including working with an embedded tutor (a tutor in my online class)
   d. Yes, I have used both in-person and online tutoring, including working with an embedded tutor (a tutor in my online and/or in-person class)

7. In-person experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied were you with your interaction with the staff member at the front desk of the tutoring center?

Not satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very satisfied

8. In-person experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how welcomed did you feel to our on-campus tutoring space?

Not welcome 1 2 3 4 5 Very welcome

9. In-person experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how comfortable did you feel to our on-campus tutoring space?

Not comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 Very comfortable

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

11. Online experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied were you with your interaction with the staff member moderating the online tutoring room?

Not satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very satisfied

12. Online experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how welcome did you feel to our online tutoring space?

Not welcome 1 2 3 4 5 Very welcome

13. Online experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how comfortable did you feel with our online tutoring space?

Not comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 Very comfortable

14. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

15. Both in-person and online experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied were you with your interaction with the staff members at the reception desk in-person and zoom room in the tutoring center?

Not satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very satisfied

16. Both in-person and online experience: How similar were your interactions with staff members between the in-person reception desk and online Zoom room?

Not similar 1 2 3 4 5 Very similar

17. Both in-person and online experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how welcome did you feel about our in-person and online tutoring spaces?

Not welcome 1 2 3 4 5 Very welcome

18. Both in-person and online experience: On a scale from 1 to 5, how comfortable did you feel while in our in-person and online tutoring spaces?

Not comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 Very comfortable

19. As someone who has used both in-person and online services, you have a lot of knowledge about our program. Can you briefly describe any similarities and/or differences you have noticed between our in-person tutoring services and online tutoring services?

20. Where would it be helpful to see a direct link to the free tutoring at [our institution]? Click all that apply.
    a. Canvas
    b. Student portal
    c. Reminder emails
    d. Social media
    e. Multiple options above
    f. Other
    *Please, specify where it would be helpful to see a direct link to the free online tutoring services at [our institution].

21. How important would it be for you to read a short bio of your tutor before a tutoring session? A bio is a short paragraph containing information about someone. This is an example of a bio: Saghar Shaldin is an experienced Math 104 and Japanese tutor. She's a former [Our Institution] student who transferred to [Another Campus] and is majoring in Economics. Saghar speaks English, French, and Japanese.

Not important 1 2 3 4 5 Very important

22. What kind of information would you like to read in the tutor bio? Click all that apply.
    a. Name
    b. Content area expertise
    c. Other subjects that they tutor in
    d. Major
    e. Other languages that they speak
    f. Languages that they can tutor in
    g. A fun fact about them
    h. None of the above
    i. Other

23. Do you use any scheduling software (for example, iCalendar and Outlook)? Click all that apply.
    a. iCalendar (Apple)
    b. Outlook
    c. Google Calendar
    d. None
    e. Other

24. Would it be helpful for you to have your tutoring appointment automatically saved in your calendar?
    a. Yes
    b. No

25. Which one is more important to you when seeking tutoring support?
    a. To be able to work with a specific tutor
    b. The days and times when tutoring is offered
    c. Both
    d. Other

26. Which do you prefer more: online tutoring or in-person tutoring?
    a. Online tutoring more
    b. In-person tutoring more
    c. No preference

27. Which do you prefer more: making an appointment or drop-in tutoring?
    a. Appointments more
    b. Drop-in more (no appointment needed. You receive tutoring on first-come first-served basis)

28. Which do you prefer more: one-on-one tutoring or group tutoring?
    a. One-on-one more
    b. Group more (two or more students working with a tutor at the same time)
    c. No preference

29. Please, choose the option that best applies to your content status:
    a. Current SDCCD student
    b. Former SDCCD student (no longer plan on attending SDCCD after Spring 2021)

30. What is your age range group?
    a. Under 18
    b. 18–24
    c. 25–29
    d. 30–39
    e. 40–49
    f. 50 and over
    g. Prefer not to say

31. How do you self-identify?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Non-binary
    d. Unknown
    e. Prefer not to say
    f. Other

32. How do you self-identify?
    a. Asian
    b. Black
    c. Latinx
    d. Native American
    e. Pacific Islander
    f. White
    g. Two or more
    h. Prefer not to say
    i. Unknown
    j. Other

33. Is English one of your first/native languages?
    a. Yes
    b. No

34. Are there any additional comments or feedback that you would like to share?