

Book Review

Yook, E. L., & Atkins-Sayre, W. (2012). *Communication centers and oral communication programs in higher education*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. (287 pp., paper \$44.99, e-book \$41.99).

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As the editors note in the foreword, two significant events occurred in 2001 that made a powerful impact on communication centers and oral communication: The first Excellence at the Center conference was held, and the National Communication Association's (NCA) summer conference "Engaging 21st Century Communication Students" featured communication centers as one of the seven conference threads. Most importantly, these two events allowed for an enhanced focus on and interest in communication across the curriculum programs and communication centers.

The increased attention on communication centers allowed for the creation of over 70 communication centers affiliated with the NCA, two Ivy-league centers, and some communication centers devoted exclusively to business students. As a result of this growth, Yook and Atkins-Sayre identify three goals for this book: The primary goal is to offer one volume that combines both theoretical issues and practical issues related to communication centers and general oral communication programs for an audience composed of both novices and seasoned experts in the field. The editors' second goal is to provide administrators and those interested in higher education with information about the value of communication centers. The final goal is to stimulate additional research about communication centers.

The book features 18 brief chapters and is divided into four sections with the

first part focusing on the vital role communication centers have in higher education and highlights the following issues: retention, critical thinking, liberal arts curricular goals, student empowerment, and student growth. The second part of the book, "Challenges to Today's Centers," examines issues such as ethics, training students as consultants, assessment, increasing student visits, and faculty support. The third part of the book features new ideas to consider implementing in centers, including the use of space (both on campus and online), combining speaking and writing centers, and technology. The book concludes by offering new ideas for training consultants, including technology training, empathic listening, and best practices.

This book certainly presents information relevant to readers of this journal as well as the general higher education population. Each chapter offers clear statements of purpose and, for the most part, well developed literature reviews. Each chapter in the fourth part of the book as well as chapters 7 and 8 provide those currently working in centers with an overview of disciplinary trends and, more importantly, offer suggestions for advancing the field. As the editors note, this book is unique given the breadth and depth of the information related to communication centers and is presented in a well-organized and well written manner. Those interested in investigating the alternative uses of space as

well as technology in communication centers are especially encouraged to read chapters 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16. For those interested in enhancing the consultant training process, chapters 7, 17, and 18 will be particularly helpful.

While this text offers helpful information, there are also clear areas for improvement. In terms of methodology, many chapters suffered from small sample sizes, essentializing (i.e., having one professor's viewpoints represent an entire discipline), and not providing readers with the project's interview or survey protocol. While the authors are careful to note most of these limitations, one would expect a study included in the first book published on communication centers and oral communication programs to include representative samples and measures.

The second area of improvement would have been to include more information about oral communication programs. An introductory chapter explaining the historical development of oral communication programs and communication centers would have been most welcome and would have also reduced the redundancy found in the literature reviews of most chapters. Despite its title, this book focuses almost entirely on communication centers. Fortunately, chapter 6 offers a clear delineation of the differences between communication across the curriculum, communication in the discipline, and communication against the disciplines programs.

The final area of improvement involves the entire first part of the book directed toward administrators, among others. The first chapter attempts to discover the impact a campus communication center has on persistence to graduation rates. While readers do not learn which institutions are examined, we do learn that we should "consider the possible *theoretical*

relationship between campus communication centers and college student retention" (p. 9, emphasis mine). Since this chapter is an administrator's first exposure to this topic, it is unfortunate that a solid argument with a larger sample and more reliable data is not presented. The second chapter also includes a missed opportunity: Atkins-Sayre writes "If communication centers begin to sell themselves as a vital component of the curriculum not only because of the contribution they make to oral communication competence, but also because of their ability to enhance the critical thinking skills of our students, then faculty might begin to incorporate centers into the curriculum in a more significant way" (pp. 20-21). It is unfortunate that this chapter did not highlight the ways in which oral communication programs and/or communication centers are already linked to two national initiatives directed by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U). Oral communication skills feature predominantly in AAC&U's initiatives and thus provide communication programs and centers with a clear ethos (and built in assessment measures) that all administrators—and regional accrediting bodies—would appreciate.

While this collection included areas for improvement, the book succeeded in its overall goal to stimulate additional research about communication centers. Moreover, the book provides a clear overview of the variety of communication centers as well as the different types of approaches and activities occurring within those spaces. Future research in this area should focus on the integral nature of oral communication programs and how these programs are connected directly to AAC&U's High-Impact Educational Practices and the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Institute. Aligning

communication centers' and oral communication programs' outcomes assessment plans with these initiatives will allow for additional research using a variety of methodologies that meet clearly the criteria for validity, reliability, credibility, transferability, and dependability.