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The Paths People Take Through Teaching Center Services: A Descriptive Analysis

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Teaching centers offer a variety of services, ranging from teaching orientations and one-time workshops to intensive programs such as learning communities to individual consultations. However, most instructors do not participate in all categories of service a center offers; rather, they create their own paths through various combinations and sequences of programs. What do we know about these pathways, and what can we learn from the patterns of use? This article shares findings from an analysis of several years of data to learn more about the sequence in which instructors experience educational development and to discuss the implications of these findings.

Introduction

In many ways, educational development is a field defined by variation, diversity, and change. It is still an evolving and relatively new addition to higher education, without the centuries of history of other disciplines. Professionals in the field come from a wide range of backgrounds and academic disciplines, and teaching centers themselves differ greatly in size, mission, structure, and placement within the institution. Despite all this variation, however, a survey of the field by Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach (2006) found "a fair degree of consistency" in the kinds of programs and services offered, "regardless of the size or mission of the institution"

(p. 14). Similarly, in her overview of programs, Lee (2010) states that, while "the range and number of programs and services offered by individual centers varies considerably," their offerings tend to fall within a set list of categories. (p. 26). Lee's list of categories is similar to that provided in Sorcinelli et al. (2006), which includes the following:

- Consultations for individual instructors

- University-wide orientations

- University-wide workshops

- Intensive programs

- Grants and awards for individuals and departments

- Resources and publications (pp. 14-16)

Not every center may offer all of these categories of service, and the specific programs within each category may vary tremendously, but it still can be argued that these categories form a set of expectations for the types of services a teaching center should offer.

While these categories have become fairly standard, they do not go unexamined. There has been scholarship looking at overall use of services (Plank, Kalish, Rohdieck, & Harper, 2005; Wright, 2011), at the effectiveness of educational development programs in general (Bélanger, Bélisle, & Bernatchez, 2011; Pchenitchnaia & Cole, 2009), and at the impact of specific services, such as individual consultations (Finelli, Pinder-Grover, & Wright, 2011; Jacobson, Wulff, Grooters, Edward, & Freisem, 2009;) or course design institutes (Johnson, Allen, Maynell, Nelms, & Plank, 2011; Johnson, Linder, Nelms, & Palmer, 2012).

A meta-analysis by Chism, Holley, and Harris (2012) looks at many more studies like those above to examine what we know about the impact of various categories of service, including consultations, workshops, and more intensive programs such as learning communities, communities of practice, and courses on college teaching. Regarding consultations, they find that the "literature supports the case that those who establish a consulting relationship with faculty members are likely to be able to support their transition to successful implementation of teaching change" (Chism et al., p. 139). They also discover evidence that intensive programs like communities of practice and learning communities "contribute to changes in faculty practice" (p. 136). Their analysis of the literature on workshops, which grouped together both short, individual workshops and multi-part workshops in a series, found that "Assuming the quality is high, there

appear to be moderate improvements in demonstrated teaching behaviors as the length of the workshop increases" (p. 135).

This last finding confirms the intuitive sense many educational developers have that a one-hour workshop does not lead to the same degree of change as longer, more intensive interactions with teachers. The question one must ask, then, is why do workshops continue to be such a frequent offering by centers for teaching and learning? The answer Chism et al. (2012) give is that "workshops are used to elevate the visibility of professional development units or activities or to interest faculty in more intensive interventions" (p. 134).

This statement, as made by Holley, Chism, and Harris (2011) in an earlier presentation of their findings at a conference, was the impetus for this study. It is a common assumption that programs such as teaching orientations or stand-alone workshops are a gateway into educational development. While developers accept that a single workshop may not lead to great change, the hope is that people will first attend events that demand less investment of time and effort, and then proceed to "more intensive interventions" that require a greater commitment from participants. While this is a common assumption behind teaching center programming, do we have evidence that it is true?

This question leads to a broader conceptual question. Teaching centers offer an array of services that are carefully scaffolded to build from the introduction to teaching offered in an orientation, to the fundamentals often taught in workshops, and then eventually on to deeper and more extended experiences offered through services like learning communities, book discussion groups, and teaching consultations. This is the "curriculum" educational developers design, the structure that explains the categories of service most centers offer. However, individuals do not participate in all of our programming, nor do they go through programs in a set order. Rather, they pick and choose their participation, creating their own paths though our services. The goal of this study is to discover and describe these pathways and to explore what they tell us about how people experience educational development.

The Data

To answer these questions, we studied user data from the teaching center at a large research university—a successful teaching center, it must be noted, that has documented the effectiveness of its programs. The center's database comprises records of more than 11,000 individual instructors, 1,700 different events and programs, and 5,400 individual consultations

since 2001. However, in order to make sure that we were likely to capture a client's first encounter with the center, we narrowed the sample down to those whose first record was after January 1, 2005. This eliminated those clients who may have met with the center before records were kept (i.e., whose first record in the database may not be their first contact with the center). For the same reason, we narrowed the events and consultations to those that took place between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2011. Our resulting sample included 5353 clients and 10,712 records spanning seven years (with one record for each interaction, whether it be participation in a program or an individual consultation).

Then, because we are interested in the general categories of service described by Sorcinelli et al. (2006) and Lee (2010) and analyzed by Chism et al. (2012), we coded records according to four categories:

0. *Orientations.* This category includes large annual orientations for new TAs, as well as some smaller departmental orientations to teaching. Note that, unlike many centers, this center does not run the university-wide new faculty orientation, which definitely has an effect on the results.

1. *Workshops.* For simplicity we will refer to this category as workshops, but it includes not just workshops but all stand-alone, one-time events that meet for less than a day, such as guest speaker presentations, on-campus mini-conferences, and brown bag discussions. This category also includes events and workshops offered by the center within individual departments or colleges.

2. *Intensive programs.* This category includes programs such as learning communities, course design institutes, and book discussion groups. Each program involves a series of meetings ranging from 4 weeks to a year, but each program counts as one record (e.g., each year of a year-long learning community counts as one record).

3. *Consultations.* Each consultation with a member of the center staff is recorded as a separate record. Consultations are on a variety of different teaching topics, and many of them include collecting student feedback.

The frequencies for each type of interaction are shown in Table 1.

It is important to note that a handful of orientations (11) account for almost one fifth of all interactions because orientations may have 500 at

Table 1
Number of Interactions by Program Category

	Number of Interactions (n = 10712)	*Number of Events in Each Category*
Orientations	1980 (18%)	11
Workshops	5402 (50%)	463
Intensive programs	667 (6%)	83
Consultations	2661 (25%)	2661

tendees each, whereas an individual consultation has, by definition, only one person in attendance. Also, while the numbers of workshops and attendances in workshops are many times greater than the equivalent numbers for intensive programs, an "interaction" in an intensive program may account for several weeks to a year of involvement and anywhere from 4 to 20 meetings, whereas attendance at a workshop usually represents about 1-2 hours of time, and each workshop is only one meeting. Consequently, despite the differences in numbers, the actual contact hours in the categories may be much closer.

Because our interest is in the paths people take through the center services offered, our next step was to restructure the data by person, so that each row in the table represented a person, with columns showing in order each of their interactions with the center. This allowed us to see each person's personal pattern of interaction with the center. We thus ended up with records for 5353 people. Graduate student instructors made up 61% of this sample (*n* = 3278), which also included 703 faculty (13.1%), 305 non-tenure track instructors (5.7%); and 722 staff members (13.5%). Each person had anywhere from 1 to 52 interactions interactions with the center. Finally, we then organized these rows by the sequence of categories for each persons' interactions, leading us to identify the 32 different patterns shown in Table 2.

Results

Once the data were restructured in this way, we could begin to look for patterns in the data to see the various paths people took. The first general pattern to emerge was that, while the number of interactions per person ranged from 1 to 52, two thirds of the subjects (*n* = 3518) had only one

Table 2
Patterns of Interactions

Pattern Number	Description of Pattern*	N	%
1	0s only	1453	27.1%
2	0s & 1s	267	5.0%
3	0s & 2s	12	0.2%
4	0s & 3s	32	0.6%
5	0s, 1s & 2s	13	0.2%
6	0s, 1s & 3s	27	0.5%
7	0s, 2s & 3s	3	0.1%
8	0s, 1s, 2s & 3s	10	0.2%
9	1s only	2442	45.6%
10	1s & 0s	63	1.2%
11	1s & 2s	92	1.7%
12	1s &3s	145	2.7%
13	1s, 0s & 2s	7	0.1%
14	1s, 0s & 3s	2	0.0%
15	1s, 2s & 3s	60	1.1%
16	1s, 0s, 2s &3s	8	0.1%
17	2s only	161	3.0%
18	2s & 0s	0	0.0%
19	2s & 1s	52	1.0%
20	2s & 3s	14	0.3%
21	2s, 0s & 1s	1	0.0%
23	2s, 1s & 3s	27	0.5%
24	2s, 0s, 1s & 3s	0	0.0%
25	3s only	309	5.8%
26	3s & 0s	9	0.2%
27	3s & 1s	82	1.5%
28	3s & 2s	23	0.4%

Table 2 (*continued*)
Patterns of Interactions

Pattern Number	Description of Pattern*	N	%
29	3s, 0s & 1s	6	0.1%
30	3s, 0s & 2s	0	0.0%
31	3s, 1s & 2s	39	0.5%
32	3s, 0s, 1s & 2s	4	0.1%
	Total	5353	100%

Note. *The pattern description shows the order of interactions by category for each participant, regardless of number of interactions in each category.
0 = orientations; 1 = workshops; 2 = intensive programs; 3 = consultations

interaction. Of those, 3231 attended either a workshop or an orientation (categories 0 and 1). Thus, while educational developers may like to think of workshops and orientations as gateways to what Chism et al. (2012) call "more intensive interventions" (p. 134), 60% of the total number of people in our sample attended only a single event in this category and never returned.

If we broaden our set to include those who had multiple interactions with the center, we find that an even greater majority—79%—attended some combination of orientations and workshops only, with no interactions in the categories of intensive programs or consultations. Furthermore, 82% of the people who worked with the center had interactions that fell into only one category. That number breaks down by category, shown in Table 3. These numbers reinforce the idea that we cannot view individuals' participation in center programs in the context of the entire range of services, because a vast majority have only one type of interaction with the center, and a majority of those participate only in the short-term, less intensive programs.

Another striking finding is that only 0.2% of the clients followed what may be considered by educational developers to be the "typical" or even desired pattern. That is, only 10 people in a sample of more than five thousand started with an orientation, then attended a workshop or

Table 3
Percentage of Participants, by Role, Who Participated in Only One Category of Programs

Program Category	Faculty	Instructors	Staff	Graduate Student Instructors	All Participants*
Orientation only	9.1%	9.2%	35.9%	35.9%	27.1%
Workshops only	45.0%	52.1%	71.9%	39.3%	45.6%
Intensive Programs only	8.4%	4.9%	5.5%	1.3%	3.0%
Consultation only	14.7%	13.8%	4.8%	3.7%	5.8%

Note. *In addition to faculty, instructors, staff, and graduate students, the total column also includes other participants such as visitors and those whose status is unknown.

two, and then moved on to more intensive programs and consultations. Obviously, this is not the only pattern that can be effective, but it is clear that we cannot assume that this is the typical or even common context for clients' experiences with educational development programs. The patterns of use also call into question the notion that orientations and workshops serve as entry points into teaching center services. Clearly, both types of programs serve a need, but it is helpful to re-examine their role in light of these data.

Orientations

As stated above, orientations at this particular center tend to be large events, with attendance numbers around 500, in part because many departments require their TAs to attend. The center invests a considerable amount of time in designing and implementing these orientations because the university recognizes the importance of providing some preliminary support to incoming teachers. Orientations are designed to give new faculty and TAs at least some minimal preparation before entering the college classroom, but developers also hope, and perhaps assume or even state, that an orientation is only the first step in a teacher's development. It is impossible to provide everything teachers need in an orientation before they teach, which is why most orientations include some sort of encouragement to return for additional support. But our analysis shows that the majority of orientation participants do not in fact return. While over one third of the total sample ($n = 1917$; 35.8%) participated in an orientation of some sort, 74.5% of those who participated in an orientation ($n = 1428$) had no further interaction with the center.

While this number may be somewhat disappointing, perhaps it is useful to recognize that, even though only a quarter of participants return, the large enrollment numbers for orientation mean that, in this case, 364 people who first interacted with the center at an orientation returned for at least one other category of service, and perhaps those 364 people might otherwise not have sought out any teaching support. But when weighing the costs and benefits of programming, it is also important to consider that 27% of the center's clientele are people who attend an orientation only. In this particular case, the center has since implemented programming and outreach designed to reconnect with orientation participants more directly, in hopes that a greater number of novice teachers will get the kind of ongoing development opportunities that can have an impact on their teaching.

Workshops

It is not uncommon at conferences to hear educational developers question the impact of individual workshops and even to share frustration at the time spent on them. However, workshops still remain a common service of teaching centers. In this study, they were by far the most common interaction, making up half of all interactions ($n = 5402$). More interesting, perhaps, is that most of those people ($n = 2442$) attend only workshops. Of those who attend a workshop, 86.6% (45.6% of the total sample) attend only workshops. If one rationale for workshops is that they introduce teachers to center services, it is not clear that they are doing so to any great extent. Of the 2819 individuals whose first encounter with the center was a one-time event, 64.4% ($n = 1815$) never returned, and only 11% ($n = 314$) went on to participate in either an intensive program or a consultation or both.

Intensive Programs

The number of people who participated in at least one intensive program is much smaller than the two previous categories ($n = 516$; 9.6%), although it must be remembered that the extent of these individuals' interaction was, by definition, longer. It is also noteworthy that those whose first contact with the center was an intensive program were far more likely to return for other events and for other categories of events than those whose entry point was an orientation or workshop. Of those whose first interaction was an intensive program, 43.9% returned for at least one more interaction, and 36.9% returned for at least one other category of program. Furthermore, 11% returned for at least two other categories of interactions, compared to only 2.4% each for those who began with an orientation or workshop. (The number of return visits does not include attending multiple events that are part of a longer program since each record represents the entire period of a program and all meetings that are part of it.)

Consultations

Consultations remain a common and, as studies like Jacobson et al. (2009), Finelli et al. (2011), and Chism et al. (2012) show, an effective service when it comes to bringing about change in teaching. One quarter of the interactions in this study were consultations ($n = 2661$), with 15% of clients participating in at least one consultation ($n = 790$). Of those, 66.9% ($n = 309$) participated only in consultations and did not attend any

workshops, orientations, or intensive programs. Those who started with a consultation, however, are the most likely to return for at least one more interaction (67.3%), perhaps because the consulting process lends itself to developing an ongoing relationship, with staff at the center.

Table 4 summarizes the return rates according to the category of a center client's first interaction and the percentage who go on to participate in at least one other category of event. This summary shows that, while orientations and workshops are more successful in bringing larger numbers of people through the doors of a center, intensive programs and consultations actually serve better as entry points to other categories of service and to return visits.

Analysis by Role

The final question we examined was whether or not the teaching roles of center participants were a factor in the patterns of use. For this analysis, we defined four categories of teacher roles: faculty member, instructor, TA, and staff member. We separated part-time, fixed-term, and adjunct instructors into a category separate from faculty because an important question in educational development today is how well we serve non-tenure-track instructors. For simplicity, the TA category includes primarily graduate student instructors, many of whom are independently responsible for their classes and not "assisting" anyone, as well as a much smaller number of undergraduate students and post-docs. The staff category encompasses members of the university community who have primarily staff positions but may teach or work with students (e.g., student affairs personnel).

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey posthoc comparisons was used to compare mean service use measures (both continuous and categorical) between role groups. Statistically significant differences were found on all measures examined at the $p < .005$ level of significance ($F > 3.7$ for all measures, with 4 DFs for role group comparisons and 7 DFs for administrative unit category comparisons). Chi-square analysis was used to compare various paths taken among role groups. Similar to the ANOVA results, significant differences in paths were found at a significance level of $p < .001$ and $X2 > 623$ for cross-tabulations of group by path. Thus, statistically significant differences were found in overall use of service measures and in the service pathway measure within role groups.

Figure 1 shows participation in each of the four categories of program broken down by teaching role. While faculty and instructors are not dissimilar in the kinds of programs they are likely to participate in, there are significant differences between faculty and TAs. Notably,

Table 4
Percentage of Return Visits by Category of First Interaction

| *Category of First Contact With Center*	*% Who Return for Another Interaction*	*% Who Return for Another Category of Interaction*
Orientation	21.3%	19.4%
Workshop	35.5%	13%
Intensive Program	43.9%	36.9%
Consultation	67.3%	31.5%

faculty are much more likely than TAs to participate in intensive programs and con-sultations ($p < .001$ for both), whereas TAs are by far the most likely of all groups to participate in orientations and workshops ($p < .001$ for both). TA participation in orientation is explained by the nature of the program, which is designed specifically for TAs and required for some of them, but this does not account for their lower numbers in the categories of intensive programs or consultations.

Figure 2 looks at these comparisons from a different perspective, showing the average number of interactions in each category of programs by role group. Again, there are highly significant differences, particularly between faculty and TA interactions in intensive programs and consultations ($p = <.001$ for both). Graduate students and other TAs are frequent participants in orientations and workshops, but they do not appear to move on to more intensive programs and consultations at a comparable rate to faculty. Perhaps this is due to their time restraints as both students and teachers, or perhaps it reflects their current stage of development as teachers, but it certainly is a question for consideration for those of us who work on preparing our future faculty.

Discussion

Overall, the findings of this study suggest a re-examination of the standard categories of services that teaching centers provide and the rationale and expectations for each type of service. For example, even if one-time workshops are not, in fact, serving as a gateway to other programs, they may be serving other purposes. Perhaps a schedule of workshops provides visibility to the center that goes beyond attendance. Or perhaps

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Figure 1
Participation in Each Category by Teaching Role

■ Orientation   ■ Workshop   ■ Intensive program   ■ Consultation
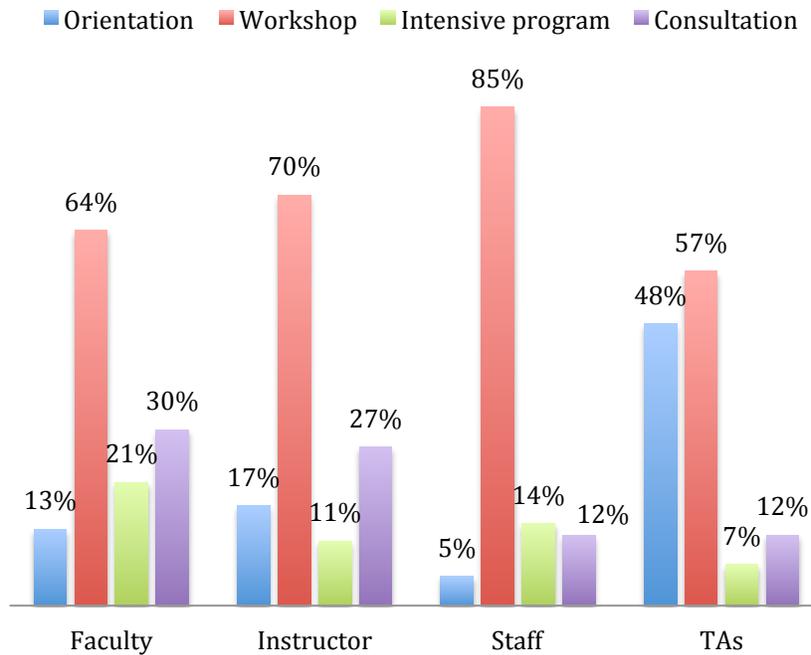
workshops contribute to creating an institutional culture that prioritizes teaching and learning. It may also be worth investigating whether those participants who do not return to the center continue to work on their teaching independently or in other venues.

Centers may need to weigh priorities of depth versus breadth and try to find the balance between attracting large numbers of participants (as workshops do) and engaging a smaller number of people in longer, more intensive programming. Many educational developers probably agree that one-time workshops are not an end in themselves, but we also cannot assume that connections to other program offerings will occur spontaneously, and we may need to be more intentional in how we use workshops and how we connect them to a teacher's ongoing professional development.

Figure 2
Average Number of Interactions Per Category
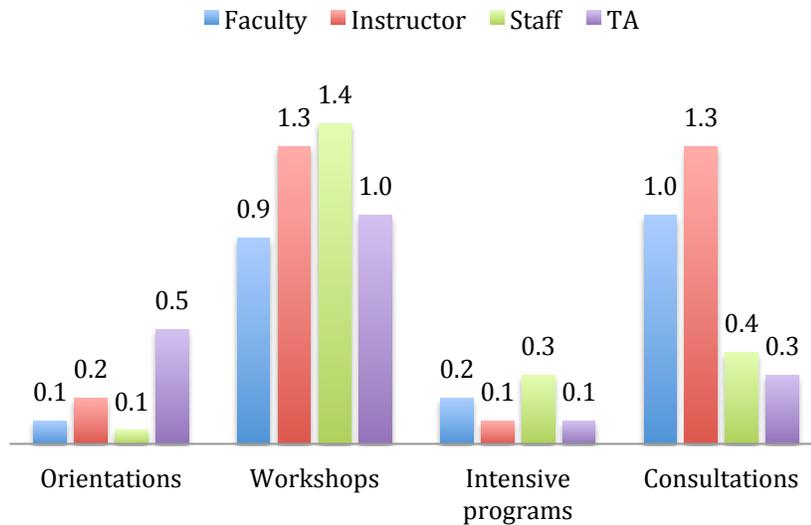
In a period of limited resources, it is also important for centers to look at the return on investment of programs. Large, foundational events like orientations demand a great investment of resources, so it is wise for centers to find ways to maximize their impact. As noted above, the center in this study has been experimenting with outreach and programming to reconnect with orientation alumni. Future analysis will be needed to determine the impact of these efforts. Those establishing new orientation programs may find it useful to build similar components into their plans. For example, a new faculty orientation may be linked to a year-long new faculty learning community.

Intensive programs are rewarding for educational developers because the programs gives them the opportunity to interact with teachers over time and to see change and development. This study shows that such programs do not have to be seen only as an end goal, but that they can also serve as a first step in educational development. So, while it is common to think of workshops as introductory and intensive programs as more

advanced, it could be both helpful and productive to think about how one might turn that structure upside down. For example, perhaps workshops on specific teaching methods could be marketed to past participants of a course design institute. Or members of a learning community on assessment could be invited to a workshop on rubrics.

Consultations continue to be a core service at many centers, and, because they are done individually, also represent a high investment of time per client. Research has shown that when they are done well, they can be very effective in leading to change and improvement. This study shows that a majority of those who interact with a center, especially graduate student instructors, do not take advantage of this individualized service. Most centers, especially those at large universities, could not accommodate providing consultation to all clients, but it may be useful to examine how to encourage more consultation, again, particularly with graduate students. Conversely, because so many people participate only in consultations, it may be beneficial to find ways to encourage them to participate in other programs, as both a replacement for multiple individual consultations and as a way to engage them with other teachers, not just educational developers.

Educational development in the 21st century must be evidence based and responsive to the needs of a diverse population of faculty and graduate students. Better understanding the different ways instructors experience our programs helps us do both. This analysis lets us see our programs from the perspective of those we serve and also provides us with useful evidence for making decisions about the services we provide.

Conclusions

This study offers a descriptive analysis of patterns of use found at a specific institution. The results challenge some of the common assumptions and rationales for center programs, but they also introduce new questions that invite further research. A first set of questions involves the implications of these findings for how people experience educational development. For example, does it matter if people participate in categories of service "out of order," perhaps starting with intensive programs and then attending workshops? One could hypothesize that those who have engaged in an intensive program first will bring a larger context to individual workshops that increases their impact. What is the effect, if any, of participating in only one category of programs? How does the individual pathway that someone creates affect his or her overall experience of educational development?

A second set of questions focuses on how representative these findings are. For example, are patterns of use different at other types of institutions, such as primarily undergraduate institutions that have a smaller faculty cohort and no significant numbers of graduate student instructors? If so, how? How do other categories of service, such as grants, that this center did not offer fit into the patterns of use? A multi-institution comparison of data would be a helpful next step in this line of research.

Finally, this study leads us to consider what the future holds for teaching centers and educational development in general. In 2006, Sorcinelli et al. stated that educational development was entering a new period they called "The Age of the Networker" and predicted changes in the ways in which we work within the institution. Current surveys of the field may soon identify yet another, even newer period of educational development. Will the standard categories of programming continue to be relevant, or are they being replaced by other categories? And what patterns of use will emerge in those new categories? The findings in this study may change over time or differ among institutions, but the approach of looking at patterns of participation can continue to provide a useful perspective on the work of teaching centers and the services we offer.

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