ACTLA Offers Online Tutoring Program Certification
White Paper

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Abstract

Association of Colleges for Tutoring and Learning Assistance (ACTLA) announces the launch of their Online Tutoring Program Certification. The Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) endorsed the certification in April 2020.

A research effort from fall 2017 to April 2019 by the Association of Colleges for Tutoring and Learning Assistance (ACTLA) developed online tutoring standards for the field of college learning assistance. ACTLA provided a unified voice among all CLADEA associations while developing online tutoring standards. The standards are based on focus groups of experts from six CLADEA Council members, as well as online tutoring vendors.

From this research effort, an ACTLA team (listed above) created *Principles, Standards, and Effective Practices for Quality Online Tutoring,* known as the ACTLA Online Tutoring Standards (www.actla.info) The Standards include four categories: Infrastructure, Meaningful Engagement, Training, and Assessment & Evaluation.

These Standards were completed and shared in April 2019 at the annual ACTLA conference. This led to the CLADEA endorsement in April 2020 of *ACTLA's Online Tutoring Program Certification* which promotes best online practices in tutoring and learning assistance based on the Standards.

Background

History of ACTLA

ACTLA is an organization consisting of tutoring, learning assistance, and academic success center professionals in higher education. It works to build communities of learners committed to research-driven and innovative practices. Organized in 1973 within the California Community College system, the first conference was held at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria on May 2, 1974. Through 1983 the organization was called the California Community College Tutorial Association (CCCTA); beginning in 1984, the name changed to the Association of California Colleges for Tutoring and Learning Assistance (ACCTLA); then in 2002, a strategic planning committee approved a final name change to the Association of Colleges for Tutoring and Learning Assistance (ACTLA) and began a broader outreach nationally. ACTLA became a member of the Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) in 2012.

Mission

The vision of the Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) is to "provide leadership and a unified voice to advance the profession of postsecondary learning assistance and developmental education." (www.cladea.info).
The CLADEA mission is to "foster mutual support among national and international organizations dedicated to postsecondary learning assistance or developmental education. CLADEA associations." (www.cladea.info).

ACTLA is dedicated to the improvement of diverse college and university tutoring and learning assistance services. Education and development of the professionalism of its members and commitment to the success of all students are at the heart of the Association. (www.actla.info)

The Need for Standards

With the advent of online courses, there has been a mandate to provide online academic support for those who cannot access in-person college learning centers and tutoring programs. In addition, students are seeking online tutoring for on-campus and blended courses. Online tutoring has already been expanding within college tutoring and learning centers. ACTLA saw the need to provide quality online tutoring services to our students and to help our professionals build these programs.

The standards have been put in place in April 2019 to serve as a guideline in developing quality online tutoring programs. With the advent of COVID-19 in March 2020, most college campus learning centers have had to turn solely to online tutoring services in order to provide academic support. The need is greater than ever before.

History of ACTLA Standards Development

With its roots in California's Community College System, part of the ACTLA mission is to continue to serve California colleges, its largest constituent. To that end, the California Community College Success Network (3CSN) and ACTLA Board met regularly in 2017 to develop a plan and strategy for the creation of standards. 3CSN and ACTLA were intentionally inclusive, transparent, strategic, and nationally focused in order to gather a wide range of feedback and input from CLADEA association members and from for-profit online tutoring company representatives. A year-long design and rollout was implemented and in April 2018 when a diverse group of thought leaders convened at the 45th Annual ACTLA conference in San Diego, CA. The three-and-a- half hour working meeting focused on five "standards" initially established through a survey sent to the field in October 2017: accessibility, delivery, evaluation, interaction, and training. Additional standards from the survey included marketing, convenience, integrity, and support.

ACTLA took the lead in this effort with the input of The Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA). Between April 2018 and April 2019, all the CLADEA member associations which provide leadership for college academic support programs, met in focus groups at their respective conferences to provide research for best practices for online tutoring programs. These associations included National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA), College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), National

Organization for Student Success (NOSS), National Center for Developmental Education (NCDE), and Association of Coaching and Tutoring Professionals (ACTP). Online tutoring company representatives participated from Pearson-Smarthinking, Link-Systems International, Inc.- NetTutor®, Tutor.com, Brainfuse, Upswing, and TutorMe. (www.actla.info)

A team of ACTLA Board members (listed above) then integrated their feedback into the document *Principles, Standards, and Effective Practices for Quality Online Tutoring,* known as the ACTLA Online Tutoring Standards (www.actla.info)

The following table shows four areas which exemplify the development of a quality online tutoring program. These include general guidelines, best practices for online tutoring programs, online tutors' perspectives, training to conduct online tutoring, guidance for online students and their expectations.

Principles and Standards at a Glance (www.actla.info)

	4 Guiding Principles	Standard	Effective Practice
Infrastructure	A quality learning experience in an online tutoring environment involves convenient access, accessible technology, multi-functional delivery, and media-rich resources.	Institutions, Providers, and Programs should continually assess and improve the functionality and performance of the delivery system, learning platform, etc. for optimal systems and functional performance.	The provider should have well established practices to ensure the consistent delivery and access to online tutoring for all student participants.
Meaningful Engagement	A quality learning experience in an online tutoring environment builds on what a student knows and can do and addresses gaps in student understanding while providing students opportunities to express and demonstrate as evidence of learning.	The online tutor incorporates strategies to foster active learning, including one-on-one and group formats, participation by all students. This interaction should be between tutor and students as well as between students.	To ensure quality interactions between tutors and students, tutors should apply strategies for active learning, collaboration, and participation.
Training	A quality learning experience in an online tutoring environment involves tutors that are trained in current, research-based tutoring practices, online tutoring practices, using the learning platform, and other online tools. Pedagogical online practices and content elements are multiple skill sets required for holistically addressing	Institutions, providers, and programs should ensure that online tutors are trained appropriately to conduct tutoring in an online environment to ensure a quality tutoring experience.	Training includes best practices for meaningful engagement of students in online tutoring sessions, and provide specific recommendations to promote active, collaborative learning/participation in an online setting.

	online environments with student needs.		
Assessment and Evaluation	A quality learning experience in an online tutoring environment involves effective coordination and evaluation of services, tutors, training, and technology.	Evaluation includes a review of online tutors' competencies and processes, a protocol for collecting information on the online tutoring program, and an analysis of the effectiveness of the program including its use of technology and its training.	Evaluation includes a review of online tutors' competencies and processes, a protocol for collecting information the usage of on the online tutoring program, and an analysis of the effectiveness of the program.

The History of the Certification Process

In January 2019, ACTLA initiated the process of proposing endorsement for ACTLA's certification for online tutoring programs. Each CLADEA member organization elects one representative to the CLADEA Council. Each member association then has one vote to determine certification endorsement. After completion of the Standards in Spring 2019, an ACTLA Committee worked throughout the summer to develop an application to CLADEA for approval.

CLADEA has clear criteria for associations to meet the standard of certification as stated in its Policies and Procedures (www.cladea.info). The endorsement application must state requirements specifically and require programs to verify these qualifications through documentation. The certification cannot overlap with other member association certifications. Components account for fees, annual reporting, and a process of identifying, reviewing and removing unqualified certifications.

In order to meet the criteria, ACTLA also had to conduct a review of research (see References) and a field test by CLADEA professionals in the corresponding area requested. Four college campuses piloted the application process in fall 2019 and provided feedback by December 2019. The ACTLA Certification Review team reviewed their feedback and resubmitted the ACTLA Certification endorsement application to CLADEA in January 2020.

The CLADEA review process must be unbiased and conducted by professionals with expertise in online tutoring programs. The council elected three representatives to extensively review the application and provide feedback to ACTLA and to all six Council representatives. They met again online in April 2020 and voted for endorsement of the ACTLA Online Tutoring Program Certification. A formal written endorsement followed.

Programs which would like to be certified for their online tutoring program must meet the following criteria:
- Be from a two-year or four-year public/private college or university
- Provide synchronous online tutoring
- Conduct online tutoring with the institution's students and/or professional tutors

- Have conducted online tutoring for at least one year
- Conduct training for online tutoring as well as recommended general tutor training
- Use an interactive platform
- Conduct evaluation of the online tutors and assessment of the program

These criteria are specifically outlined in the *ACTLA Online Tutoring Standards* and the Certification application.

Conclusion

College and universities, led by their tutoring and learning centers should strive to adhere to proven, expert-identified effective online practices to maximize student academic success as outlined in the *ACTLA Online Tutoring Standards*. The ACTLA Online Tutoring Program Certification challenges colleges to provide the best quality programs and services and demonstrate that they have achieved these Standards.

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