Learning Center Welcomes New Coordinator Robert Plienis

Robert Plienis, Success Strategies and Writing & Languages Tutoring Coordinator

This past November I joined the Learning Center as the tutoring coordinator for both the Success Strategies and Writing and Languages Desks, as well as the testing coordinator for students with disabilities. I am originally from Louisville, KY, but lived in Charlotte, NC for a few years before I relocated to Indianapolis, Indiana in 2012. I earned a bachelor’s degree in Women’s Studies, and a master’s degree in Women’s and Gender Studies from the University of Louisville. Immediately before joining Ball State, I served as Director of the BUILD Program at the University of Indianapolis. The BUILD Program is a comprehensive academic support program for students with learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and autism spectrum disorder.

I have spent most of my career working with diverse learners either through programs like BUILD, or during my time in the classroom as an adjunct professor of Women’s & Gender Studies. Given my experience, I very much appreciate the role the Learning Center plays in success and retention of Ball State students.

It’s hard to believe I’ve been here almost six months….time flies when you’re having fun, right? During this time I have been very impressed by the dedication, professionalism, and enthusiasm of our tutors, Supplemental Instruction leaders, and our graduate assistants. It’s a privilege to work in an environment surrounded by individuals who care so much about supporting their fellow students and improving their academic performance.

I know I speak for Gary and Jenny when I say we want to be sure we are providing meaningful experiences and resources for our clients through tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, traditional and online workshops, and test proctoring. We also want to be sure we are proactively supporting our student staff as well with quality training and professional development opportunities. We are always reviewing these programs for improvement, and welcome your feedback.

As mentioned earlier, I am also an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Louisville. I teach online and hybrid courses that examine the intersections between gender and disability and between gender and communication. I’m hopeful I will have the opportunity to teach similar courses at Ball State in the future.

In my free time I enjoy traveling, time with family and friends, NPR (it helps with the daily commute from Indianapolis), working out, and all things food/coffee/wine. I’m happy to be here, and am thankful to everyone for making me feel so welcome!

What does the Learning Center offer?

• Free tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, and a variety of workshops for all BSU students
• The opportunity for students to collaborate with a peer trained in academic support services in a relaxed, informal learning environment

Learning Center Usage: August 2014-March 2015

- Science and Humanities Tutoring: 955 students, 5,025 visits
- Math and Business Tutoring: 1,002 students, 4,407 visits
- Success Strategies Tutoring: 250 students, 619 visits
- Writing and Languages Tutoring: 532 students, 1,783 visits
- Test Proctoring: 216 students, 1,311 tests administered
- Supplemental Instruction Online: 1,610 students, 12,174 visits
- Satellite Center (Woodworth Nursing): 34 students, 67 visits
- Totals: 3,373 students, 25,391 visits
Jessica Poore, a senior from Muncie, began tutoring at the Success Strategies Desk this semester. Her specialties are test-taking and note-taking skills, time management, and managing test anxiety. Jessica was attracted to this position because she came from a strong background in volunteering, and nothing makes her happier than helping others succeed: “I had a client who came in with little knowledge on how to study for tests. He told me that he had failed his first test because he had no idea how to approach studying for the test. So in a few sessions, we went over his study skills, discussed implementing new study skills, and had weekly meetings to evaluate his progress. After a few of our tutoring sessions, he was able to get an A on an exam in one of his hardest classes! He stated that he did not feel as anxious about taking tests because he felt more prepared.” Jessica is a sociology major who plans to attend Ball State to pursue a Master’s degree in sociology. Coordinator Robert Plienis comments that “Jessica conducts meaningful tutoring experiences with her clients, and they regularly share positive feedback about their sessions with her. Jessica is an asset by managing desk operations during scheduled periods when no Graduate Assistants are available. Her positive attitude and work ethic are unparalleled!”

Evan Henderlong, a senior from Crown Point, Indiana, has been tutoring for two years. He was originally hired for Japanese tutoring and has branched out to writing and anthropology. In reflecting on one of his success stories, Evan comments on the gratitude shown by students for their tutors: “I had a foreign exchange student who was failing her anthropology class and needed help. After working with me, she began passing her tests. She saw me that next semester and approached me to thank me for helping her bring up her grade to pass and was so excited to tell me! It was so great to see how I impacted someone that much.” Coordinator Jennifer Haley adds that “Evan has been a steady and consistent tutor in a very demanding area: chemistry! He is often a requested tutor and his clients are very loyal.” Evan plans to attend graduate school, become a teacher, and teach English in Japan for a few years, or possibly work for a government in human relations.

Tyler Gilham, a senior from Pittsboro, Indiana, has been tutoring chemistry, biology, anatomy, and physiology for two years at the Science and Humanities Desk. Tyler’s advisor recommended that he apply to be a tutor, and the fit was right: “I quickly fell in love with tutoring and working with my peers; helping them succeed has always been really fulfilling for me.” Tyler has a great success story to share: “This semester, I have a client that came to me with a lot of confusion about her chemistry class. This is her second attempt at passing the class and she is clearly frustrated with the material. A few weeks have passed, and my client is starting to see some serious improvement in her grades. She brings in her graded tests and quizzes and I can see myself that she is indeed improving. After talking to her about the class content, it is abundantly clear that she knows what she’s doing. Just today she corrected me on some of the content. The student has become the teacher! I am proud to have helped her achieve her accomplishments.” Coordinator Jennifer Haley adds that “Tyler has been a steady and consistent tutor in a very demanding area: chemistry! He is often a requested tutor and his clients are very loyal.” Tyler, a pre-med and biology major, plans to obtain a Master’s degree in Physiology before heading off to med school.
Kristen Santucci, a sophomore from Carmel, Indiana, has been serving as the ANAT 201 SI leader for three semesters. “I wanted to become an SI leader because ANAT 201 is an extremely difficult course. In high school I had an IEP and I really struggled with my classes. I came to college and my first semester I had to take ANAT 201. Everyone told me to expect to get a C+ in that class with Professor Wilkins because it is impossible. I received an A in the class and decided to become an SI to show students that if I can get an A in the class, they can, too! To me it is more than helping with the material; it’s about being there for them with any concerns or stress with the class. I just wanted to help students in anyway possible!”

Kristen has many success stories in her work with students: “Many students have told me that they could not have made it through the course without me. It is very comforting to know that I truly did help the students. The impact of my SI sessions did not hit me until the report came out last semester. The only students in Anatomy 201 who received an A in the course were students that came to SI. There was no one who received an A who did not come to the SI session. If you asked me in high school if I would be teaching 130 students in college Anatomy, I would not believe you. It has truly been a blessing to see the SI program grow so much and to see the impact I’ve made on students. None of this would have been possible without the help and support of Jennifer.”

Coordinator Jennifer Haley comments that “Kristen has an incredible work ethic. She also has a way of making students feel comfortable—even within the intimidating size of her study sessions, which regularly exceeded one hundred students. Her work with students is phenomenal, and she will be missed next year!”

After graduation, Kristen plans to pursue a career as a Pediatric Oncology Nurse and work with all the kids at Riley Children’s Hospital.

Nathaniel Hunt, a senior from Auburn, Indiana, has tutored at the Math and Business Desk for two semesters. Nathaniel was drawn to the position because of his enjoyment for the material and his desire to be a professor.

Nathaniel has had many success stories: “One student has visited my study session [for MATH 351] frequently and I have been able to review practice problems and help prepare him for the exam in June. I am excited to hear from him when he passes!”

An actuarial science major, Nathaniel will be begin working as an actuary in Fort Wayne in May, and he will be getting married in July.

Coordinator Gary Ritz comments: “Nate has served as an excellent tutor and mentor for other tutors at the Math/Business Tutor. His clients are always requesting him as a tutor so he is very effective in his tutoring style. Nate makes his clients feel comfortable and has been able to help many students with math and business courses. His calm demeanor and skill in explaining complex information are two of Nate’s strengths as a tutor. Nate has also shown a lot of initiative working at the Learning Center. He recognized a difficult class in the Actuarial Science curriculum and approached me about holding some extra academic assistance opportunities for students in that class. With collaboration with the instructor, Nate organized and has offered weekly review sessions for MATH 351 this semester which the Learning Center has never done before. I thank Nate for his dedication and hard work as a tutor for the Learning Center Math/ Business Desk and know he will be a successful future actuary.”

Best of luck to all of our Superstar tutors and SI leaders!
Many of the tutors and SI leaders in the Learning Center are awarded Dean’s List honors every semester. Read more about other prestigious awards and honors received by our exceptional student staff.

**Student Staff Honors and Awards**

**Carolyn Straiker** (Success Strategies), a senior Biology major, is very active in the department as the treasurer of The Wildlife Society, and she has conducted her own research project on small mammal communities in a tall-grass prairie. For the 2014-2015 academic year, she was awarded the Outstanding Undergraduate in Field Sciences Award by the Department of Biology. She presented her research project at the Student Symposium on March 31st.

**Jolyn Silver** (Math and Business) was recently honored with the opportunity to act as the Junior Marshal for the Department of Mathematical Sciences for the College of Sciences and Humanities Commencement.

**Ashtyn Eastes** (Writing and Languages) won the Modern Languages and Classics Scholarship for next year.

**Montgomery Flora** (Math and Business) was accepted into the School of Meteorology graduate program at the University of Oklahoma. Monte also was an author on a published paper in Monthly Weather Review, presented a poster at the AMS annual meeting in Arizona in January of 2015, gave a talk at the Severe Local Storms conference in November in Madison, Wisconsin, and received the AMS Named Scholarship in the fall.

**Natalie Weisman** (Success Strategies), a senior studying Speech-Language Pathology and Psychology of Human Development, will begin a Master’s program at Ball State in the fall in Speech-Language Pathology. Natalie was also chosen to be a graduate assistant at the Success Strategies Desk.

**Lauren Fosnight** (Writing and Languages) was awarded Outstanding Senior in Spanish and Philosophy. She will be serving as a volunteer English teacher in Ecuador for the next year with WorldTeach.
Tutor Awarded Fulbright Scholarship

Zoey Spengler, a tutor at the Writing and Languages Desk, was awarded a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship as part of the Fulbright U.S. Student Program.

Zoey, a Level Three tutor in the Learning Center, is graduating Cum Laude with a major and Telecommunications Sales and Promotions and a minor in Classical Culture.

After graduation, she plans to live in Maine for the summer, then it’s on to Malaysia for her Fulbright for a year starting in January 2016.

Zoey will be an ETA (English Teaching Assistant) and a US Ambassador; she will also be organizing a community engagement project centered around creating promotional videos and PSA’s about the local schools/education. She can’t wait to travel and begin completing her goal of becoming a UNICEF Ambassador!

Congratulations, Zoey!

Level Three CRLA Master Tutors Recognized

2015: Victoria Roser, Landon Kiser, Lauren Fosnight, Becca Byers, Daniela Sorrell

2013: Joseph Urban, Aubrey Smith, Zoey Spengler

2012: Brian Wysock, Jamalat Daoud

2011: William Jacobs, Quinlin Hanson

2010: Christopher Moore

2008: Jessica Connor, Erika Smith, Laura Graves, Jacy Willis

2007: Christine Rich, Kelly Sue Schroering, Andrea Dawn Frazier, Amanda Reese

2006: Andy Ahlersmeyer, Thomas Carlton

2005: Jerry White, Bernice Liang
Meet the Staff: Kaley Roberts, Academic Advisor

Ball State University and the Learning Center have both been big parts of my life. I earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology and a Master of Arts Degree in Counseling Psychology from Ball State. As an undergraduate student, I worked as a receptionist at the Learning Center Front Desk. This paved the way to my Graduate Assistantship with the Core Curriculum Desk in the Learning Center. This not only helped finance my education, but also helped me gain valuable experience and skills that I still use in my professional career as an Academic Advisor in the Freshman Advising Office at Ball State.

In my current role at BSU, I am happy to serve on the Learning Center Advisory Board as a way to stay connected and better promote these resources to the students I advise.

I believe that all students can benefit from using the services offered at the Learning Center, whether that be by attending SI sessions or seeing a tutor for help with classes and success strategies. This is a great resource to have on campus, especially for freshman students as they transition from high school to college.

I feel grateful to be a part of an institution that has this type of support system in place for its students, and I encourage all the students I advise to take advantage of the (FREE!) resources the Learning Center has to offer.

“I Love Coming Here!” Learning Center Evaluations Reflect Excellence

Tutors and coordinators are often on the receiving end of positive words and gratitude from students every day, but to really understand the effectiveness of our services and the ways in which we can improve, the Learning Center coordinators distribute a client satisfaction survey each semester.

This spring, 339 clients responded during a two-week window. Here is a summary of the results!

The majority of students sought tutoring to ask questions about specific portions of their course material and to discuss and be quizzed on some of the concepts they are learning. 97.9% of clients felt their tutor was knowledgeable about all of the content and worked with them to find answers; 98.8% reported that their tutor not only answered questions but asked questions and engaged the client in discussion; 98.8% felt that their tutor made them feel comfortable and welcome. 98.8% responded that their tutor used appropriate strategies, and 96.5% reported that their tutor worked with them to assess needs and goals. Perhaps most critically, 92.6% of clients felt that “I can now answer questions about the material in my own words, write on my own, and/or work the problems on my own” after attending tutoring.

Clients were given the opportunity to provide suggestions to the Learning Center, and many of them gave a suggestion that we hear all of the time: HIRE MORE TUTORS! And OFFER TUTORING FOR ADDITIONAL OR UPPER LEVEL CLASSES! Due to budget constraints, we are not able to accommodate all tutoring requests or increase our staff, but we certainly appreciate that the imperative is there and strive to meet our students’ needs as best as we can.

Other statements from clients allowed our tutors to see just how much they are appreciated: “I have loved coming here, and I would greatly recommend the Learning Center to my friends. My tutor was extremely helpful, friendly and beneficial for my time here at BSU.” “My tutor is absolutely wonderful and she makes the tutoring sessions fun and enjoyable! She adjusted to my learning style and explains everything to me so well. I’m lucky and thankful that she is my tutor.” “My tutor knows her stuff. She is able to make me think and helps me make an educated guess if I really don’t know. She doesn’t just give me the answers. She makes me work for them.” “My tutor is very helpful and approachable. I enjoy the Learning Center and glad I have the opportunity to get some extra help.” “I have benefitted so much from my tutoring experiences. I have been out of school a long time and needed a refresher for some math classes. I improve my learning with one on one tutoring sessions.”
Lead Tutors Take Leadership Role

An idea brought back from the NCLCA national conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico last fall, the Lead Tutor program is an opportunity for veteran tutors who have completed at least one year of tutor training to be able to contribute to the Learning Center’s success and to develop individual leadership and professional skills. Each semester four tutors will be selected to serve as Lead Tutors. The responsibilities of a Lead Tutor are: 1) mentoring beginning tutors; 2) observing beginning tutors and offering them feedback to help foster the beginning tutors’ development; 3) collaborating with the other Lead Tutors to present a tutor in-service training session; 4) serving as a resource and guide for training for all Learning Center tutors; 5) meeting with the Learning Center Coordinators during a common meeting time for discussions and collaboration on Learning Center topics and events.

During the Spring 2015 semester, the Lead Tutors were busy observing and offering advice to our many beginning tutors, presenting a tutor training in-service on learning styles and computer apps and websites that would be helpful for tutoring sessions, and developing a training video on the tutor’s role. For the Spring 2015 semester, the following four tutors were designated as Lead Tutors:

Lauren Fosnight (Indianapolis, IN) – Lauren, a senior majoring in Spanish and Philosophy, is a Spanish tutor at the Writing and Languages Desk. When asked about her experience as a Lead Tutor, Lauren stated, “Being a Lead Tutor has given me the opportunity to explore tutoring from new perspectives by evaluating tutors in other subject areas and by presenting a training session about different learning styles. The position has broadened my view of the tutor’s role and the ways in which our staff helps students at Ball State.”

Victoria Roser (Fort Wayne, IN) – Victoria, a senior majoring in Nursing, is a tutor at the Science and Humanities Desk helping students in pre-nursing and nursing classes. When asked about her experience as a Lead Tutor, Victoria stated, “As a Lead Tutor I have had the opportunity to collaborate with three other Lead Tutors, creating and expanding the Learning Center’s repertoire of resources for students, from evaluating new tutors to creating a learning module on Blackboard. The experience has been great, learning more about how much the tutors within the Learning Center impact Ball State students!”

Madison Turner (Brownsburg, IN) – Madison, a junior majoring in Logistics and Supply Chain Management, is a tutor at the Success Strategies Desk tutoring and helping students with general study skill development. When asked about her experience as a Lead Tutor, Madison stated, “Being a Lead Tutor has taught me so much about teamwork. Working with the other Lead Tutors on creating videos, organizing evaluations, and planning an in-service has shown me the kind of work and teamwork you would expect to find in the real world.”

Jacob Walker (Gaston, IN) – Jacob, a junior majoring in Mathematics, is a math tutor and Calculus review session leader at the Math and Business Desk. When asked about his experience as a Lead Tutor, Jacob stated, “My experience as a Lead Tutor has been amazing. I have been able to work with tutors from other desks and do really interactive cooperative projects. I find it refreshing to be able to work and listen to other Lead Tutors that have such different perspectives on tutoring and learning. I really think the program gives beginning tutors great resources to succeed and help their clients achieve their goals. I really do feel that this program is keeping morale and standards of beginning tutors very high by giving them access to more veteran tutors that know the everyday struggles of tutoring.”

Our very first group of Lead Tutors has done an OUTSTANDING job this semester contributing in so many ways to the successful development of our tutoring staff!
Learning is finding out what we already know. Doing is demonstrating that you know it. Teaching is reminding others that they know just as well as you.

You are all learners, doers, and teachers.

~Richard Bach

LC Coordinator Jennifer Haley Earns NCLCA Lifetime Certification; Elected Vice President of NCLCA

Jennifer Haley, Science and Humanities Tutoring Coordinator and Supplemental Instruction Coordinator, recently earned the National College Learning Center’s (NCLCA) highest level of certification, Level 4 Lifetime Leadership Certification. This certification indicates over eleven years of experience of post-secondary learning assistance, an extensive record of conference presentations and/or publications, an earned Ph.D., and service to the profession.

Haley was also elected Vice President and Conference Chairperson of NCLCA. Her presidential term will begin in October 2015.

NCLCA’s Mission is to support learning center professionals as they develop and maintain learning centers, programs, and services to enhance student learning at the post-secondary level. The organization will be celebrating its 30th annual conference this year.

Coordinators Present at National Conference

Perhaps one of the most challenging tutoring situations is working with a client who is in an academic crisis situation; a departure from the more relaxed, comfortably-paced session with a regular client.

Coordinators Jennifer Haley and Gary Ritz presented a concurrent session at the NCLCA conference in Albuquerque in October 2014 titled “ER in the LC.” They discussed strategies such as triage (identifying quickly what needs to be accomplished), treatment (helping clients to “cram” in 50 minutes or less), and intervention (enabling an assertive tutor who uses a combination of behavioral, cognitive, and social psychologic principles to “tell it like it is” in order to reach out to students stuck in a self-destructive cycle of cramming).
Aubrey (Brie) Smith was first hired as a Psychology and Religious Studies tutor at the Core Curriculum Desk (now the Science and Humanities Desk) in August of 2010, and worked for two years in that position. In August of 2013, Brie was hired as a graduate assistant at the Science and Humanities Desk, and has remained in that position until the present time.

Brie, we want to thank you for FIVE YEARS of service to the Learning Center during your undergraduate and graduate work at Ball State University! Your attention to detail and self-starting attitude were much appreciated. Coordinator Jennifer Haley notes that “Brie loves to be busy. She is most content when she is multi-tasking, and she has created many projects for herself over the years. I especially value her efforts to recognize tutors for the wonderful work they do. Brie instituted a Thank a Tutor program: clients are invited to write or email notes of appreciation about their tutors, and those comments are passed along to the tutors. Tutors who receive these special notes are listed each month and recognized for their outstanding efforts. Brie has also been through many changes with us here at the Learning Center: she survived the temporary move to AC and AJ as the Learning Center was renovated; the change of names and shifting of student staff; and the recent upgrade to a new appointment-making and tracking system, which has presented the graduate assistants with many challenges this semester. Through it all she maintains a calm demeanor.”

Brie is currently finishing two Master’s degrees: one in Rehabilitation and one in Applied Gerontology. While taking courses and working twenty hours per week at the Learning Center, Brie is also completing an internship at the Cancer Support Community in Indianapolis, where she counsels cancer patients and their families.

While at Ball State, Brie has been involved with College Mentors for Kids, Caring Arts, Multicultural Programming Committee, Sexual Assault Outreach and Prevention Team, Peer Health Education, Summer Academic Advising, and served as a discussion leader for Freshmen Connections.

After graduating, Brie will move to California to join her fiancé; she is getting married on April 2, 2016. She plans to teach at the post-secondary level, and eventually, work in a hospital setting with older adults.

“I have really enjoyed seeing the Learning Center evolve for the last five years. We have been able to reach so many students and I know the number will keep increasing with the launch of online scheduling. My most memorable experiences were when clients come in to a tutoring session so excited having just received a grade that was one or two letters higher than they previously had, as a result of our work together. I have particularly enjoyed tutoring student athletes. It has given me a personal connection to Ball State Athletics and I am happy to see students succeed on and off the ‘court’.”
Mission Statement:

The mission of University College’s Learning Center is to enhance the academic success of Ball State students by providing free peer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, and workshops covering a variety of academic issues. In addition, the Learning Center serves as a scholarly pre-professional experience for undergraduate and graduate student employees. Finally, the Center strives to impact the extended university community through faculty development efforts, learning technologies, and outreach programs at other sites.

Goals:

- Provide an educational opportunity for each postsecondary student admitted to the university.
- Develop in each student the skills necessary for the attainment of academic, career, and life goals.
- Maintain the university’s academic standards by providing academic assistance through peer tutoring, workshops, Supplemental Instruction, and review sessions which pertain to specific classes as well as broader academic skills.
- Enhance the retention of students.
- Continue professional training of the coordinators and tutors so that current theories, research, and teaching strategies can be implemented within the program.
- Guide students to reach their academic potential while realizing the benefits of academic collaboration.