



The effectiveness of tutoring from the perspective of the tutor: An ethnographic study

Senior Project

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The Esther G. Maynor Honors College
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By

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Abstract

The purpose of my study was to examine the effectiveness of tutors at the TRIO tutoring program at UNC Pembroke. During this study, I tutored for a semester in the program, so I could better know what questions to ask the tutors. After my time as a tutor, I asked other tutors in the program to take a short 22-question survey about their experience as a tutor at UNC Pembroke. Based on the qualitative and quantitative results of the survey and my time as a tutor, I found that tutors feel effective as tutors. Three common themes emerged from participants' handwritten responses. First, the tutors felt they were improving academically through review of subject matter. Second, tutors felt disappointed in students that did not try at sessions. Third, I found that tutors felt they benefited positively from the tutoring experience through work-related gains or a sense of self-improvement. Tutors found the space provided for tutoring relaxing and conducive to learning. They also found the TRIO training useful and sufficient. Based on my results, I would not recommend any changes to the tutoring program.

Introduction and Purpose

My career goal is to be a professor at a small, teaching university. I want to teach what I love: molecular biology. I have always loved teaching; so during high school and university, I volunteered to tutor struggling students. When I needed to choose a topic for my senior project, my motivation was no different: I wanted to tutor again. However, I wanted to do more than tutoring. I also wanted to investigate the effectiveness of tutoring from the tutors' perspective.

For my honors thesis project, I became a tutor in the University of North Carolina, Pembroke (UNCP) TRIO Programs. I was a TRIO tutor for the 2018 Spring Semester. Student Support Services oversees UNCP's TRIO Programs, which were founded by Congress to help lower-income American students graduate from college. Congress funds TRIO programs through Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965. In contrast to federal programs that provide students financial assistance, TRIO programs assist students in negotiating possible class, social, or cultural barriers that might prevent them from graduating (UNCP, n.d.). I wrote a survey to assess tutors' motivation for tutoring, tutors' attitudes about their tutoring experiences, and tutor's perceived benefits gained from their tutoring experiences. I received permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to administer the survey. Finally, I analyzed my data quantitatively Minitab 17 Statistical Software. (2010) and qualitatively (Willis, 2007) to see if relationships existed between tutor attitude and tutor effectiveness.

Literature Review

Studies have shown that particularly effective tutors are patient, observant, and intrinsically motivated to help students (Dvorak 2001). Studies have also shown that the students who are more likely to sign up for tutoring are the ones who want to succeed academically (Maxwell 1990). Previous research indicates that peer tutoring effectively improves academic standing for tutees (Roscoe and Michelene, 2004). Researchers have also studied how tutoring benefits both the tutee and the tutor. Roscoe and Michelene (2004) showed that the tutors learn more and retain more basic information when a tutee is present. In their study, tutors were taught basic information about the human eye and retina. Then, the tutors split into two groups. One group of tutors explained the information to video cameras. The other group of tutors taught and personally interacted with tutees. The tutors who interacted personally with their tutees remembered the information better and scored better on a quiz administered to both groups of tutors after their tutoring sessions.

Researchers have also shown that peer tutoring can be effective in helping tutors with non- academic success. Bowman-Perrott et al. (2016) showed that when non-native English speaking tutors taught other non-native English speakers lessons in English, the tutors' confidence with English grew. The tutees benefited from extra practice with the new language; however, the tutors gained confidence in their own knowledge of English. Piper (2001) showed that tutoring might boost the self-confidence of tutors. Piper (2001) investigated the factors that contributed to

students continuing as tutors at National Louis University. Piper (2001) expected that tutors would report pay as the most important factor in persistence as a tutor. Although many tutors listed pay as a reason for staying in the program, more tutors listed gains in self-confidence as a benefit of working as a tutor.

Research has shown that tutoring is effective and beneficial to both the tutee and the tutor. However, in this study I wanted to look at factors that affect tutoring effectiveness such as tutee attendance and the tutors' attitudes towards their tutoring experiences. Therefore, my theory is that tutoring remains effective, as both the tutee and tutor are motivated to attend sessions. However, in this study I wanted to investigate if the tutors' attitudes toward the effectiveness of their tutoring sessions would change their perceptions of their effective.

Ash (2015) helped define my study. She studied the impact of four male Lumbee students on a summer herpetology study. I used Ash's (2015) work as an example of using qualitative data in a research study. I also used her work as an example of how to write an ethnographic study.

SurveyMonkey (n. d. a) explains the acquiescence response bias which is a phenomenon that happens when agree/disagree survey questions like "how strongly do you agree with this statement?" People want to appear agreeable and using similar questions automatically creates a bias towards the agree statement. It is better instead to use the question "how satisfied or unsatisfied are you with this statement?" I used the later type of questions in the survey I administered to my participants. I replaced statements of agree/disagree with statements of satisfaction to gauge how effective the tutors felt their experience was. SurveyMonkey (n. d. b) provides a template that I used when making the answers for the survey given to the tutors to gauge effectiveness. This survey template provides many levels of satisfaction to use in the items I designed to gauge survey participants' feelings.

Methodology

Participants

My participants were UNCP students enrolled as TRIO tutors. TRIO tutors must have obtained grades of B or higher in the courses they tutor. TRIO tutors can be any gender, ethnicity, age, or race. Nine of my participants were female and two participants were male.

Recruitment of Participants

I used no emails, flyers, or letters to recruit TRIO tutors participants for my study. Rather, I asked tutors to participant in my survey while they were in the TRIO lounge. I hoped to recruit 10 to 15 participants in a somewhat random manner. I recruited students in the order that they agree to take the survey.): I did not exclude anyone based on race, class, gender, age, or ethnicity, and I did not ask female tutors if they are pregnant, nor did I exclude a tutor who appears pregnant. I sat in the TRIO lounge with cupcakes and asked TRIO tutors who entered if they would take a brief survey about their tutoring experiences. If they agreed, I gave the

tutors an IRB approved consent form I gave the printed surveys to participants personally and individually. Participants handwrote their responses to the survey's items. After tutors completed the survey, I offered the tutors a cupcake to thank them. My recruitment of participants and the time for them to complete the survey took around 20 minutes. I had no follow up procedures to the survey.

I kept the results confidential by entering the results of each survey into a spreadsheet without any identifying information. In the spreadsheet subjects, I identified participants' information with assigned numbers. I shredded the paper copies of the surveys after I entered the data into a spreadsheet for analysis.

Context

During this project I tutored at a small university under a TRIO programs which pays students a small stipend to tutor their peers. I attended TRIO tutor training and orientation. I tutored five different students for six hours a week. Each session was individual and lasted one hour. Only one student needed tutoring twice a week making the total number of house tutoring per week six instead of five. Towards the end of the semester I gave out twenty question surveys asking other TRIO tutors to gage how effective they thought their tutoring sessions where. I then also took the survey and analyzed the results to see if the tutors' attitude toward the effectiveness of their behavior correlated to their success as tutors. A copy of the survey given can be found in the Appendix.

Once tutors and tutees scheduled a tutoring appointment, they signed in at the TRIO office and then reported to either TRIO suite I or N. Both suites had four rooms of equal size and a bathroom. All rooms had two computers and one printer. The computers were connected to printers and students could print free of charge. All rooms had one large white board and dry erase markers. The rooms in suite I had carpet on the floors, while the rooms in suite N had laminate tiles. Both rooms had at least one desk with four chairs where students sat and worked. Some rooms had two desks but none had more than two chairs. The chairs were older office chairs, but they were comfortable.

Data Collection and Analysis

I obtained all my data (both qualitative and quantitative) from my survey. . Dr. Mary Ash (Biology Department) helped me analyze my qualitative data. I analyzed written comments on the surveys for themes (Willis, 2007). Dr. Andy Ash helped me with my quantitative data analysis. We used Minitab 17 Statistical Software. (2010).

Results and Discussion

Ethnographic Tutoring Experience

I found that at UNCP there were two tutoring programs that I could use to conduct this study. The first was a paid position for peer tutors where students request tutors and a coordinator sets up a date and time in which the tutor and

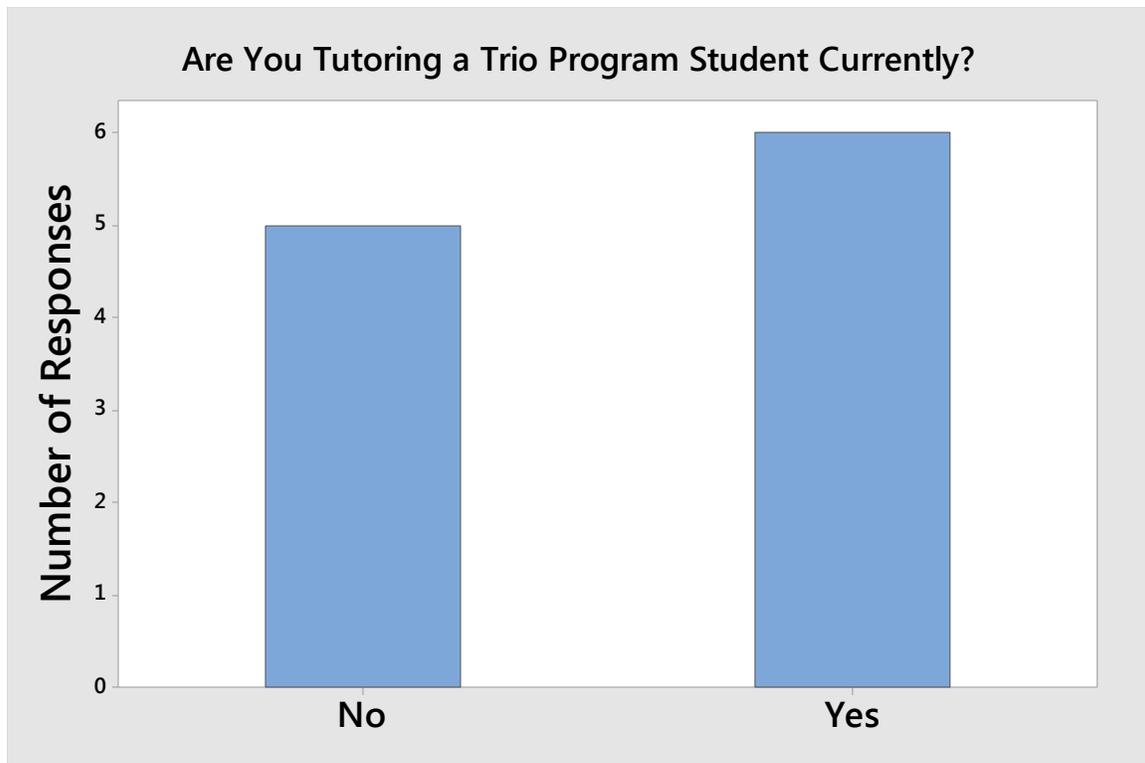
tutee will meet. For many reasons I was unable to tutor for that program. The second program was also a paid position in which a coordinator paired tutee and tutors; however, at this program the tutees had to submit an application to acquire tutoring and the tutors were given a week of training before the tutoring could begin. The coordinator for this program was very responsive to my emails, and I was able to begin tutoring January 31, 2018. My tutor training consisted of three online courses where I learned FERPA laws and what information could and could not be released. I was trained in active shooter training and in how to utilize the online tutor system to input my weekly hours.

I began tutoring a student twice a week in a biology course. The student canceled the first three sessions scheduled and we finally met two weeks after the sessions had been assigned. This student seemed willing to learn, brought her notes to sessions and showed slight improvement on later exams in the course. As the semester continued, the student continued to cancel sessions, and on April 16, 2018, the coordinator canceled all other sessions for this student due to non-attendance.

On February 14, 2018, I was assigned to tutor a student in chemistry. The student did not attend our first session and withdrew from all classes at the university before the second session was scheduled. On March 14, 2018, I was assigned another student to be tutored for a psychology class. The student and I had only one session before all sessions were canceled due to timing conflicts with the student's schedule. On March 19, 2018, I was assigned to tutor a student in math and the student attended the first sessions scheduled but cancelled the second and third scheduled session. The student did not attend and was counted as a 'no show' for all other sessions during the semester. On March 21, 2018, I was assigned two more students to be tutored in chemistry. One student did not attend the first session scheduled nor any subsequent sessions for the rest of the semester. The other student did attend the first session scheduled but no other sessions for the rest of the semester.

Results from the Tutor Surveys

Question 1: Are You Tutoring a Trio Program Student Currently?



I asked students if they were currently tutoring or if they had tutored in the past. Out of the tutors surveyed more were currently tutoring than were not.

Questions 2 and 3: Sex and gender showed identical answer patterns. See Chi Square analysis below:

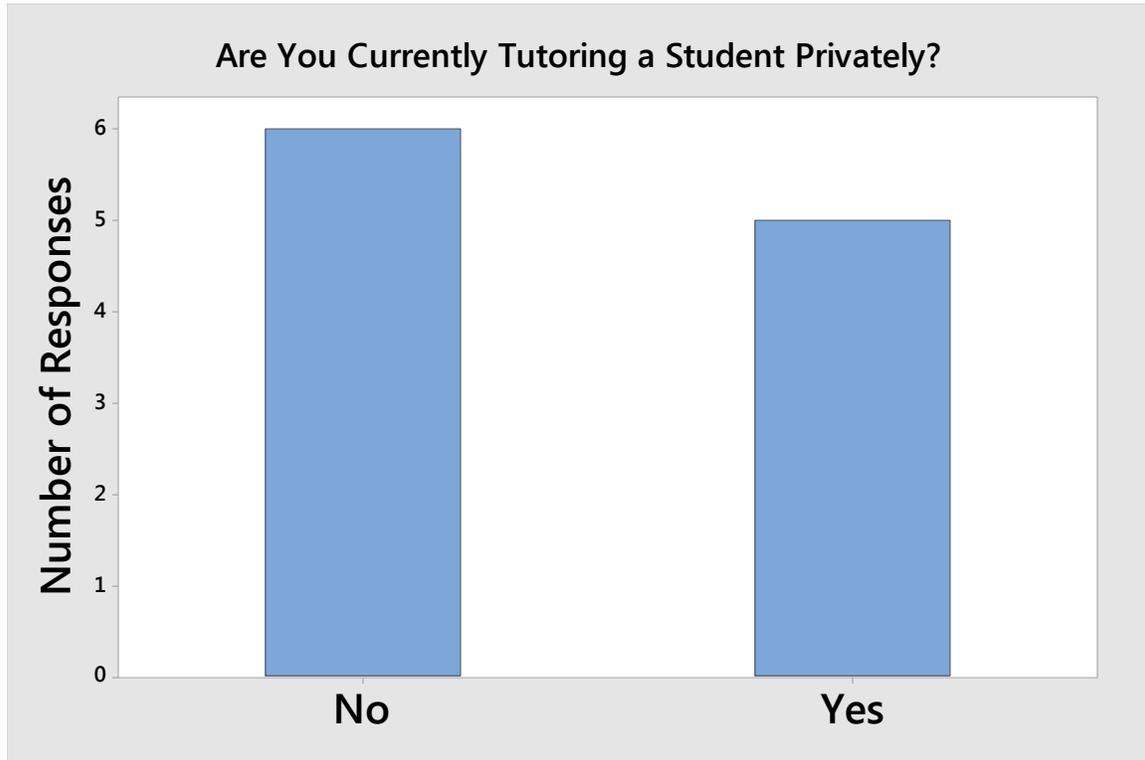
Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Test for Observed Counts in Variable: Sex of Tutor

Category	Test Observed	Contribution Proportion	Expected	to Chi-Sq
1	2	0.5	5.5	2.22727
2	9	0.5	5.5	2.22727

N	DF	Chi-Sq	P-Value
11	1	4.45455	0.035

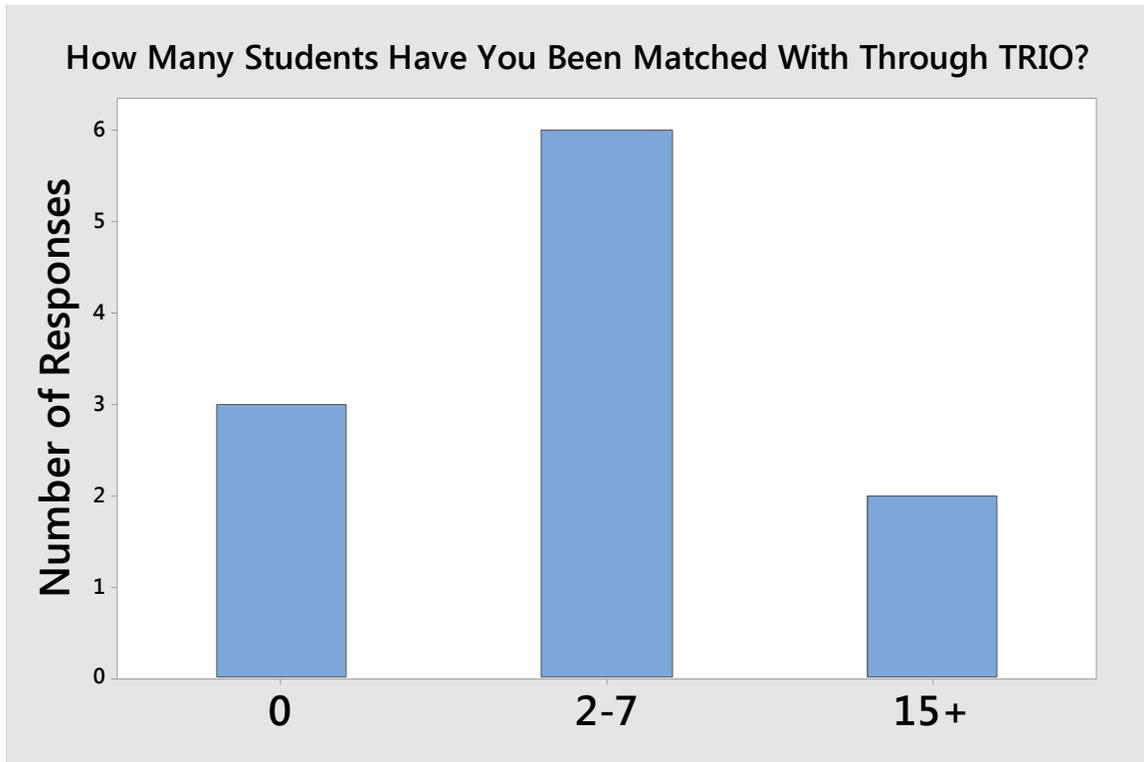
Tutors were significantly female when compared to human 1:1 sex ratio. At least in my study, more females tutor than males.

Question 4: Are you currently tutoring privately?



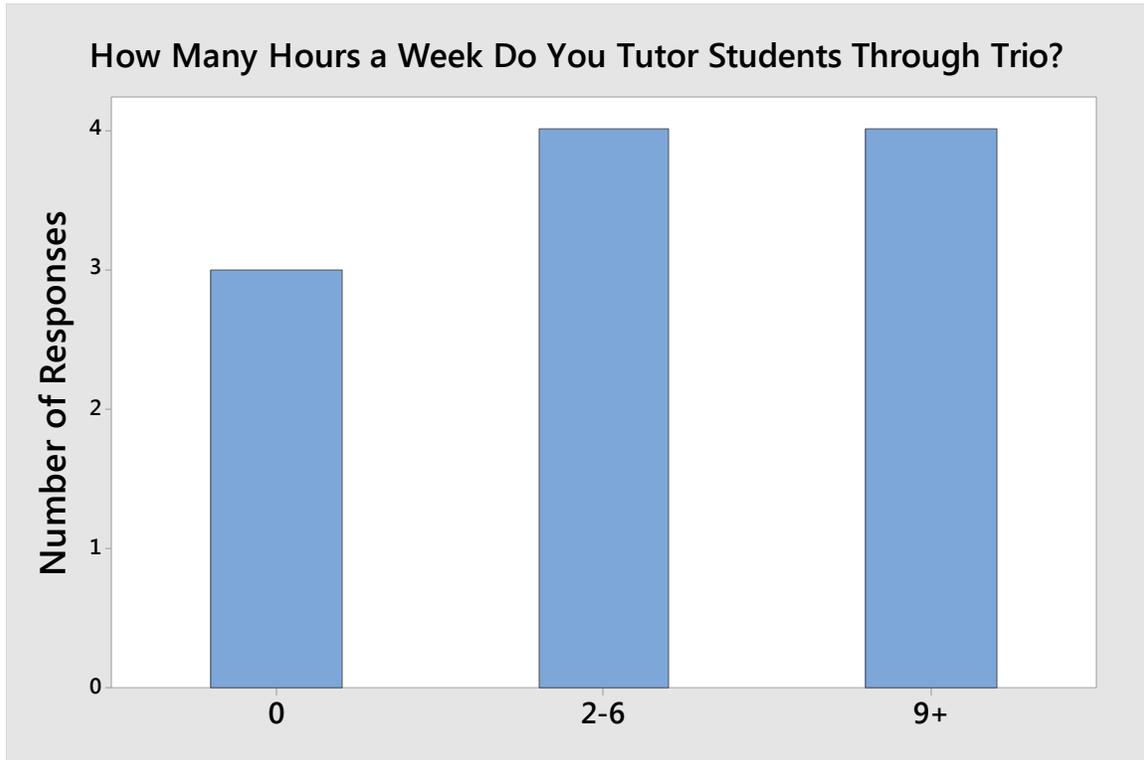
I asked students if they were tutoring privately on their own or with another student organization, or if they were only tutoring through the TRIO programs. Of the tutors surveyed, more were only tutoring with TRIO than those tutoring elsewhere.

Question 5: How many students have you been matched with through the TRIO programs this semester?



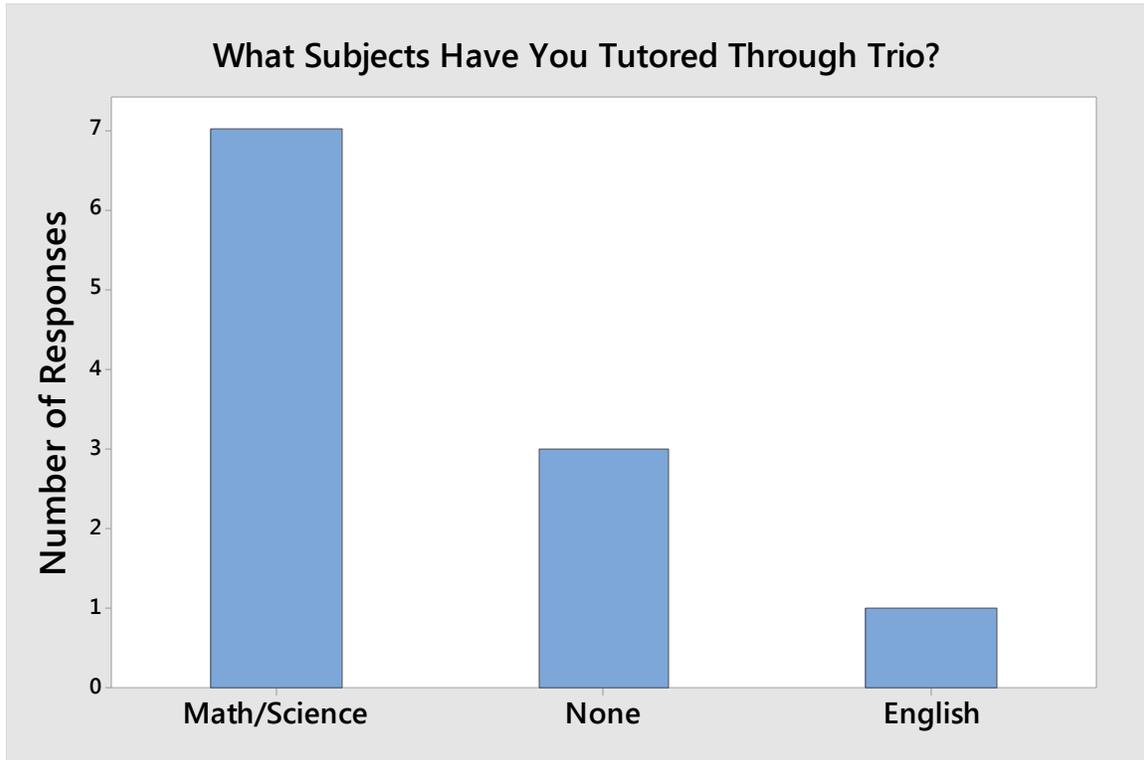
Students who were not currently tutoring gave scores of 0 because they had not been matched with any students this semester. Out of those who were currently tutoring, the average number of students they tutored was 5.7.

Question 6: How many hours a week do you tutor through Trio?



Students who were not currently tutoring gave scores of 0 because they had not been matched with any students this semester. Out of those who were currently tutoring, the average number of hours they spent tutoring was 5.5.

Question 7: What Subjects have you Tutored through Trio?



Students who were not currently tutoring gave scores of none because they had not been matched with any students during this semester. Out of those who were currently tutoring, the subjects that were being tutored most fell into a math or science category.

Question 8: What do you like best about tutoring through TRIO?

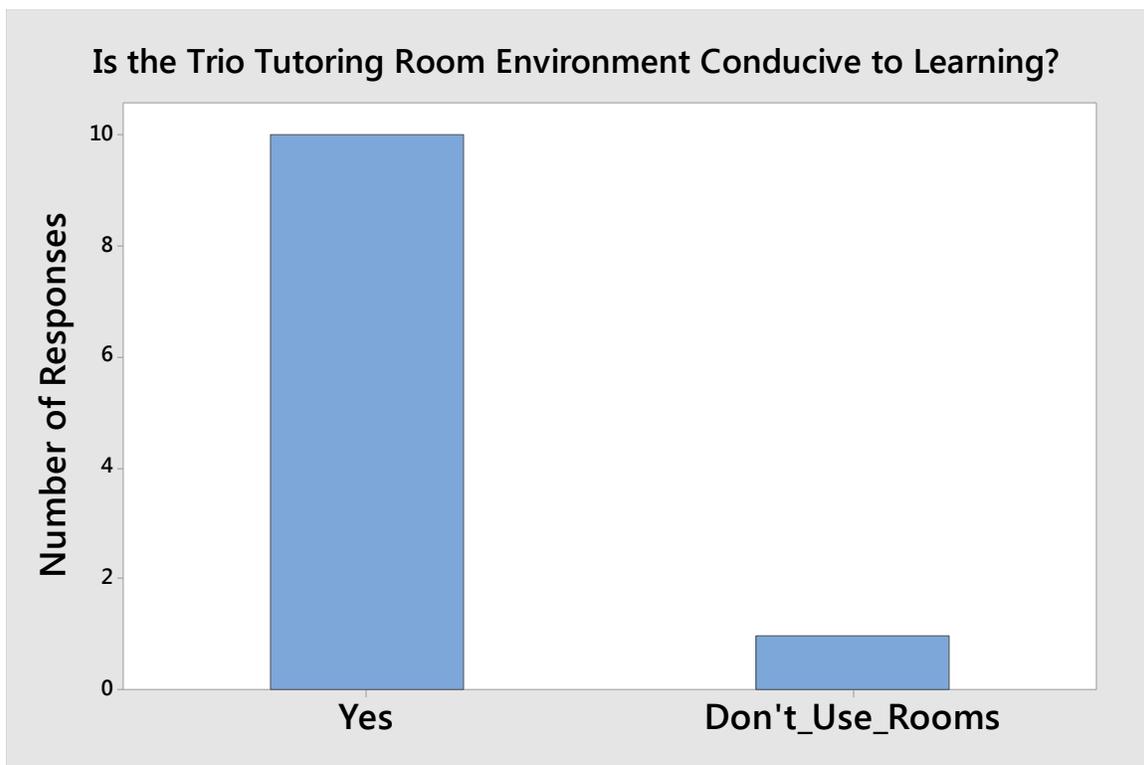
Tutors gave short hand written responses to this question. Three themes emerged from their responses. Overall tutors liked getting to review the subject matter, the good working conditions, and getting to help others. One student who valued getting to review subject matter said, "I like getting to brush up on knowledge." Another student said their favorite thing was "teaching my favorite subject." These responses would fall under the review subject matter theme. For good working conditions, students wrote about "flexibility." One student said, "I like getting paid to think." For the theme of helping others, students had responses like "I like seeing the students click with the subject."

Question 9: What do you like least?

Tutors also gave short hand written responses to this question. Two themes emerged from their answers. Overall tutors did not like the disappointment that came from students who didn't care and they did not like certain work related

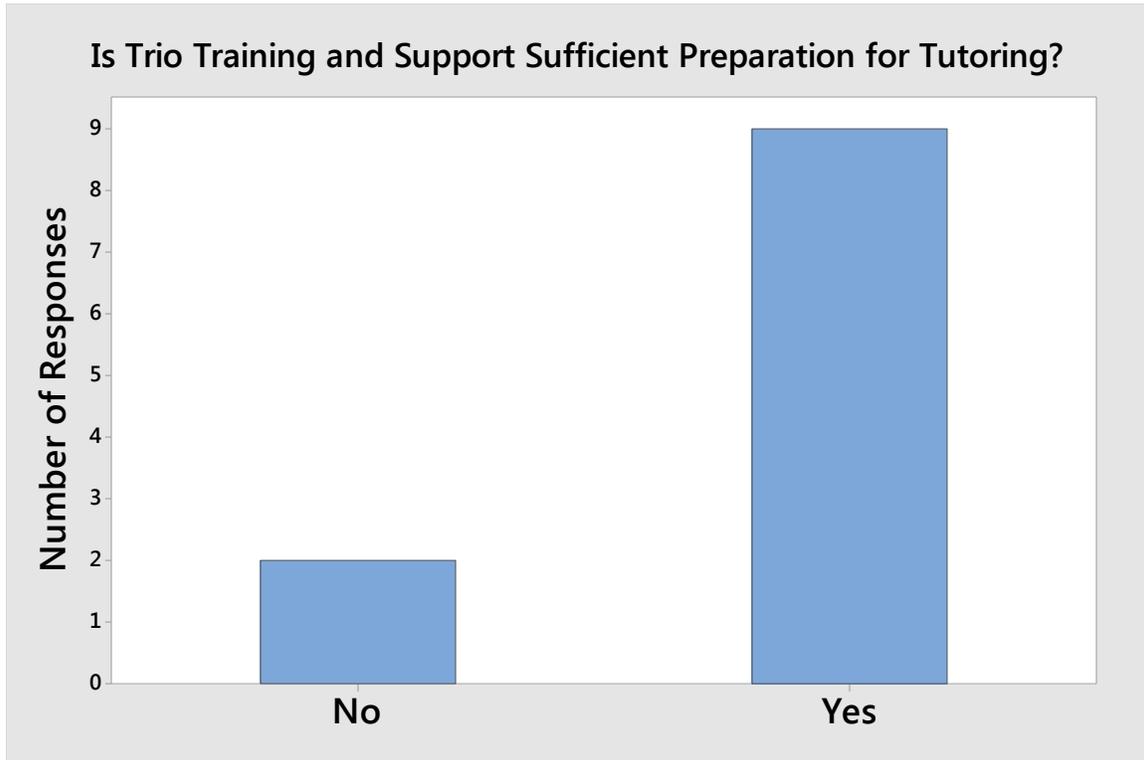
aspects. Students who were disappointed in their students wrote responses like “I don’t like students who cancel appointments all the time and don’t seem to care.” Students who did not like work related aspects of the job wrote about “variability of schedule,” that the job was “time consuming,” and that the hours were “inconsistent from week to week.”

Question 10: Is the Trio Tutoring Room Environment Conducive to Learning?



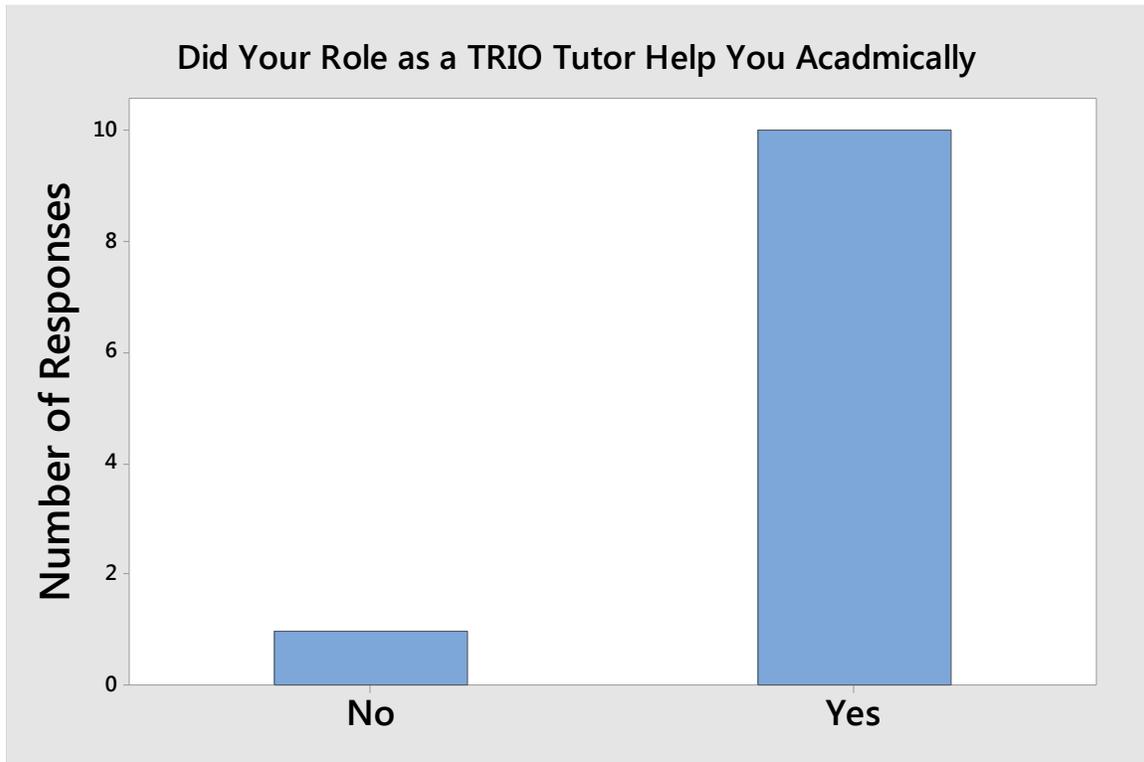
Tutors gave short hand written responses to this question. Two themes emerged from their responses. Overall, tutors liked the well-stocked rooms with teaching tools and felt the rooms created a relaxed environment conducive to learning. One student who valued the relaxed environment said, “Yes because it is relaxed and inviting.” Another student said, “Yes, I enjoy utilizing the private rooms in suite N and I. I think having a specific area makes it easy to stay focused.” These responses would fall under the relaxed environment theme. To address how the rooms were equipped with teaching tools students wrote, “Yes, allows for any study related materials.” and “Yes, the private rooms and computer etc. are plenty for me.”

Question 11: Is Trio Training and Support Sufficient Preparation for Tutoring?



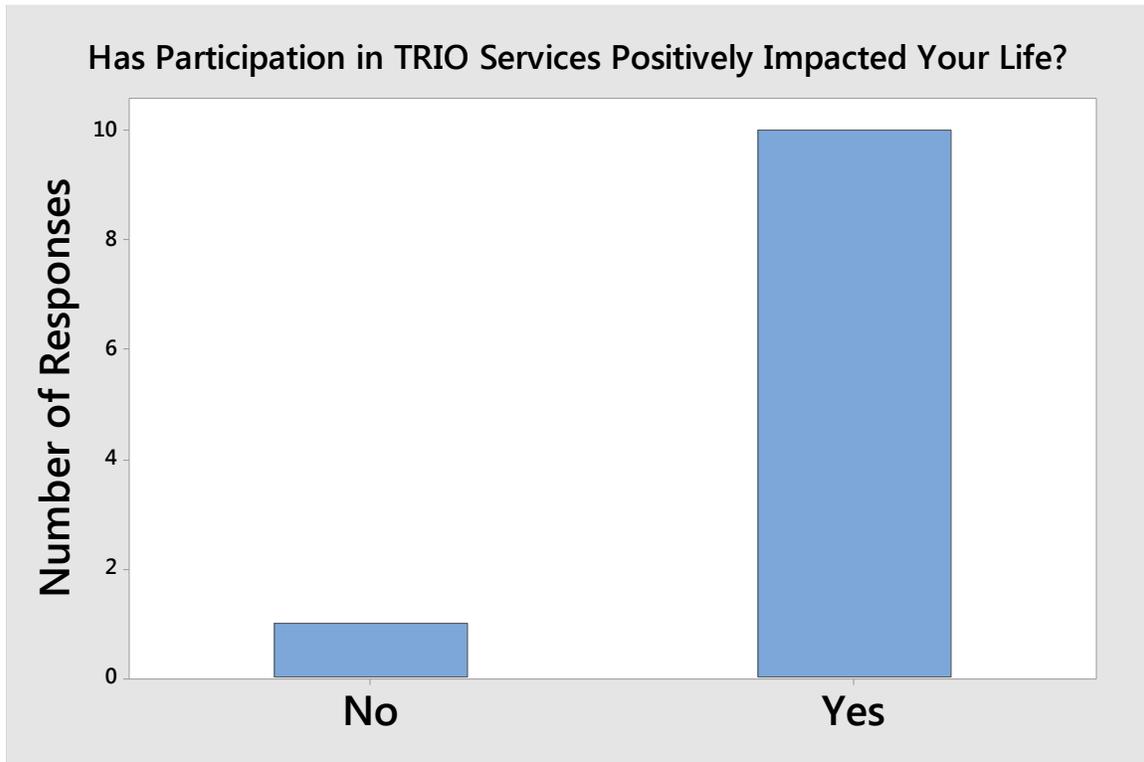
Tutors gave short hand written responses to this question. From these responses, two themes emerged. Overall, tutors felt either the training was adequate and the video modules were useful, or they felt the training was inadequate. One student who valued the training said, "Yes, the online modules was [sic] very helpful." Another student said "Yes. I did several online courses through TutorLingo." A student who felt the training was inadequate said things like "No. I had to modify tutoring based on students needs, which I was not taught."

Question 12: Has Your Participation As a TRIO Program Tutor Improved Your Academic Performance?



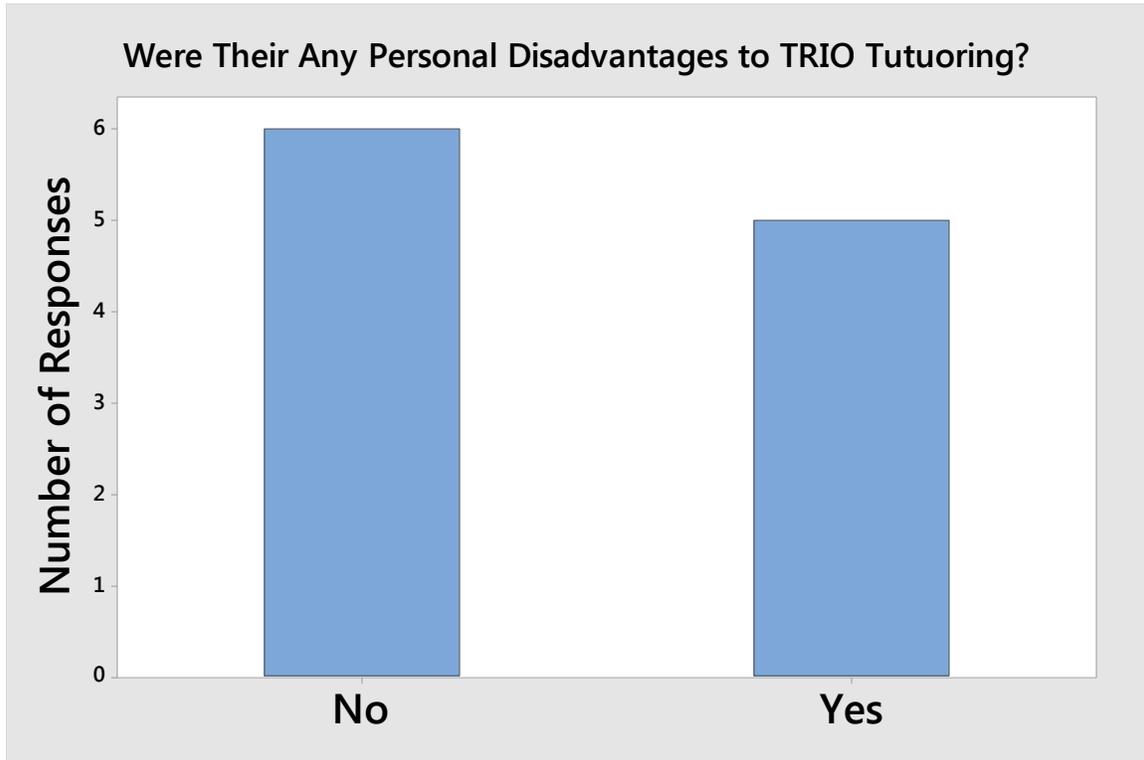
Tutors gave short hand written responses to this question. Overwhelmingly one theme emerged. Overall tutors liked getting to review the subject matter. One student said, "Yes, allowed to recite materials that I had already learned." Another student said, "Yes, tutoring for certain subjects helps cement the knowledge further in my mind. I find it helpful to revisit old courses." Another student said, "Yes, I have had to remember basic concepts and review a lot."

Question 13: Has your function as a TRIO tutor impacted you life positively (other than academics)?



In response to this question, tutors gave short hand written responses. From these responses, four themes emerged. Overall tutors felt that they gained from their experience in work related ways, by helping others, from a sense of self-improvement, and from personal enjoyment. A student who liked work related aspects of tutoring wrote, "I like staying on campus to work so I don't have travel expenses." A tutor who gained from helping others wrote "Yes. I feel like I'm giving back." A participant who gained from improving self wrote, "Yes, it has helped me to become more sociable." Finally, a student who liked the personal enjoyment of tutoring wrote, "Yes, I enjoy tutoring."

Question 14: Did you experience any disadvantages due to TRIO participation?



In response to this question, tutors gave short hand written responses. Two themes emerged through my analysis of their comments. Overall, tutors did not like the disappointment that came from students who didn't care, and they did not like the stress that came because the job is time consuming. Students who were disappointed in their students wrote responses like "When tutees don't show up to appointments with no warning I feel like it's a waste of my time even though I still get paid." Students who did not like how time consuming the job was wrote about "personal scheduling conflicts," "late nights studying," and "time spent away from other jobs."

Questions 15-22

Questions	Mean value	No opinion value	T value	P value
15. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that the TRIO Program staff provides adequate support when you have questions or problems?	1.182	3	-14.91	0.000
16. To what degree do you feel that your knowledge of the subject's you tutor improved as a result of your tutoring other students in the subject?	1.364	2	-3.13	0.001
17. To what degree do you feel that tutoring other students improved your ability to teach or guide the learning of others?	1.182	2	-6.71	0.000
18. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that your TRIO Program tutor training prepared you to tutor students effectively?	2.00	3	-4.28	0.002
19. To what degree do you feel that your tutoring sessions improved your students' academic standing?	1.818	2	-0.80	0.441
20. To what degree do you feel that your tutoring experiences helped you improve your own academic standing?	2.00	2	0.00	1.000
21. How frequently do your students cancel their tutoring sessions?	2.091	3	-5.59	0.000
22. To what degree do you feel that students canceling their tutoring sessions impacts your effectiveness as a tutor?	1.545	2	-1.84	0.096

Questions 15 through 22 were not free response questions. Instead, I asked students to circle ranged responses to questions. The mean value (given in column 'no opinion value') for all answers was no opinion or neutral, one being positive or agree and five being negative or disagree. Therefore, any result less than the mean (1 – 2.9) would signify a positive response while a value greater than the mean (3.1 – 5) would be significantly negative. For all responses tutees felt either positively or neutral. No student responded negatively to any survey item. The questions

highlighted in grey show insignificant results. For each question this means different things. Question 15 shows that overall tutors are satisfied with the TRIO program. Question 16 shows that tutors feel that their knowledge of the subject they tutored improved. Question 17 shows that tutors feel that their ability to teach improved. Question 18 shows that tutors are satisfied with the TRIO program tutor training. Question 19 had no significant results. Question 20 had no significant results. Question 21 shows that tutors frequently cancel sessions. Question had no significant results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, during my ethnographic study I found that the tutors at UNCP find that they are effective tutors for the TRIO tutoring program. During my experience, I found that students are prone to canceling sessions. However, with the results from my survey, I found no significant results to indicate that tutees canceling their sessions affect how effective the tutors feel.

I found that tutors tend to value reviewing the material, which was a major theme that emerged from their written responses. Roscoe and Michelene (2004) showed that the tutors learn more and retain more basic information when a tutee is present. This finding could explain why the tutors all seemed to value reviewing material during their tutoring sessions. Research has shown that tutors retain more information when they tutor a tutee (Roscoe and Michelene 2004).

I also found an over arching theme of tutors being disappointment in students who would not try. Studies have shown that particularly effective tutors are patient, observant, and intrinsically motivated to help students (Dvorak 2001). Perhaps this intrinsic motivation explains the theme I found of tutors liking to help others. The results from my study show that these tutors appreciate tutoring because they are able to help other students. So perhaps, they are disappointed in students canceling sessions because they do not have an opportunity to help them.

Based on my results, I would not recommend any changes to the TRIO tutoring program. Most tutors found the training and space available for tutoring appropriate. I also found that the tutors in this program feel they are effective tutors regardless of student's tendency to cancel sessions.

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Appendix

Cora Bright's TRIO Tutor Survey

1. Are you currently tutoring a student through the TRIO Programs?
 2. Please circle your sex M or F
 3. What gender do you identify more closely with?
 4. Are you currently tutoring a student privately or through another university tutoring service? If your answer is yes, please describe the type of tutoring you are providing.
 5. How many students have you been matched with through the TRIO Programs this semester?
 6. How many hours a week do you tutor students through the TRIO Programs?
 7. What subjects have you been tutoring through the TRIO Programs in this semester?
 8. What do you like best about tutoring through the TRIO Programs?
 9. What do you like least?
 10. Do you feel that the environment for tutoring sessions provided by the TRIO Program is conducive to learning? Please explain your answer.
 11. Do you think the training and support you received from the TRIO Programs was sufficient to prepare you for tutoring? Please explain your answer.
 12. Do feel that your participation in the TRIO Programs tutoring services has improved your academic performance in any way? Please explain your answer.
 13. Do you feel that your participation in the TRIO Programs tutoring services has positively impacted your life (other than academically)? Please explain your answer.
 14. Did you experience any disadvantages as a result of your tutoring experiences? Please explain.
- For the following items, please circle the responses that you feel are most appropriate to your experiences as a TRIO Programs tutor.
15. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that the TRIO Program staff provides adequate support when you have questions or problems? Please circle your response.
Very Satisfied
Somewhat satisfied
neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
somewhat dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied
 16. To what degree do you feel that your knowledge of the subject's you tutor improved as a result of your tutoring other students in the subject? Please circle your response.
I feel that my own knowledge of the subject increased greatly.
I feel that my knowledge of the subject increased somewhat.
I feel that my knowledge of the subject did not increase.
 17. To what degree do you feel that tutoring other students improved your ability to teach or guide the learning of others? Please circle your response.

I feel that my ability to teach or guide the learning of others increased greatly.
I feel that my ability to teach or guide the learning of others increased somewhat.
I feel that my ability to teach or guide the learning of others did not increase.

18. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that your TRIO Program tutor training prepared you to tutor students effectively?

Very Satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

somewhat dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

19. To what degree do you feel that your tutoring sessions improved your students' academic standing? Please circle your response.

I feel that my tutoring sessions improved my students' academic standing greatly.

I feel that my tutoring sessions improved my students' academic standing somewhat.

I feel that my tutoring sessions did not improve my students' academic standing.

20. To what degree do you feel that your tutoring experiences helped you improve your own academic standing? Please circle your response.

I feel that my tutoring experiences greatly helped to improve my academic standing.

I feel that my tutoring experiences somewhat helped to improve my academic standing.

I feel that my tutoring experiences did not help to improve my academic standing.

21. How frequently do your students cancel their tutoring sessions? Please circle your response.

Not at all

somewhat often

Very often

extremely often

22. To what degree do you feel that a student canceling their tutoring sessions impacts your effectiveness as a tutor?

I feel that students canceling their tutoring sessions greatly affects my effectiveness as a tutor.

I feel that students canceling their tutoring sessions somewhat affects my effectiveness as a tutor.

I feel that students canceling their tutoring sessions does not affect my effectiveness as a tutor.