

Tools for Clear Speech

DJ Dolack, Writing & Communications Tutorial Coordinator, SACC



As one of the most diverse public educational institutions in the country, even a brief campus tour at Baruch offers visitors interactions with students from countries such as Brazil, China, Russia, Pakistan and the US — all here under common goals of education, empowerment, and the pursuit of a fulfilling career. The extended and expansive Baruch community certainly appreciates that diversity, and understands its value among the vast network of corporate and educational partnerships. However, we also understand that such diversity brings a greater responsibility to the College's mission. Baruch is perhaps best known for its programs in Business and Administration, but attaining leadership roles in such fields requires acute communication skills. And so as the College looks to expand its international appeal, it also looks to expand the support services that play an integral role in the success of our ever-increasing international and nonnative English speaking populations.

The Tools for Clear Speech program (TfCS) offers nonnative English speakers at Baruch some of the most comprehensive, advanced and innovative oral communication tutorial services available. Overseen by the nationally certified, award winning Student Academic Consulting Center, TfCS works to empower students through American English intelligibility and the self-confidence that surely follows. Our multimodal approach to clear speech instruction features one-to-one tutorial sessions with professional Speech Consultants, small group Conversation Hours, a workshop series, access to the most advanced interactive speech software available, and our most recent initiative: a video oral communication assessment that will keep students on the track to clearer communication skills throughout their Baruch careers.

Our one-to-one tutorial sessions continue to be the most popular service as students work with professional Speech Consultants with advanced degrees in TESOL and Applied Linguistics, often in weekly sessions of 30 or 60 minutes. Our Conversation Hour offers a small group of students (up to 8 per-session) a low-stakes, relaxed atmosphere to practice their skills and engage in discussions of American society and popular culture. Our workshop series includes targeted instruction in the basics of clear speech (*Clear Speech, 101*), understanding appropriate American social behavior and contexts (*Clarity & Confidence*), and interview preparation that focuses on commonly mispronounced words and phrases (*Intelligibility in the Interview*). Students can also sign up for the interactive software programs *Native Accent* and *Rosetta Stone*, both of which engage students' speaking and grammatical proficiencies to foster a heightened level of language awareness. We are tremendously excited to continue work on our new ESL Video Oral Communication Assessment, which will engage students in four real-world tasks and evaluate them on many of the aforementioned skill sets. Through regular participation, our goal is to provide students with a portfolio of their progress and success during their study at the College, as well as use the data for a longitudinal study of the success of TfCS in order to sustain and improve its efficacy as a student support service.

A fairly common misconception is that TfCS provides *accent reduction*, and that our goal is to eliminate all traces of students' native languages from their American English pronunciation. However, we feel strongly that students' cultural identities should remain intact, and that retaining subtle accents can more often open doors of communication and common interest rather than close them. TfCS remains dedicated, above all, to the goals of clear speech and intelligibility, and we look forward to growing our program to more adequately meet the needs of the increasing nonnative English speaking population at the College. To succeed in that task, we constantly seek new partnerships with the larger Baruch community and beyond. The future of international business relies heavily on innovative programs such as TfCS to promote diversity, and enrich and expand the quality of our professional interactions. We are confident that, through our dedication and the dedication of our students, a higher level of communication is not only possible, but certain.

DJ Dolack is the Writing and Communications Tutorial Coordinator at the Student Academic Consulting Center (SACC) at Baruch College, and the coordinator of the Tools for Clear Speech program. He is also an adjunct instructor in the English Department, and has worked in various roles at the College since 2006.