

Worth its SALT

Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques at UA offers students the support they need



Maria Wahlstrom, a California native, is in her junior year at the University of Arizona, an honor student with grades that earned her a place on the dean's list.

But school wasn't always easy for Maria. In elementary school, she often felt ashamed and frustrated because she was assigned to the "slow" reading group.

"The teachers didn't use that word," she recalls. They relied on euphemisms, words such as 'turtle group' or 'green group.'

"But I believed these words meant I was slow," Maria says.

For years she suffered low self-esteem because of her difficulties with reading.

Then her high school guidance counselor took a hard look at her mediocre grades yet high verbal ability.

The counselor recognized that Maria's difficulties could be due to the learning disability dyslexia.

She recommended that Maria enroll in the most established, premier program of its kind in the

country, the Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques (SALT) Center at UA.

Maria joined more than 500 UA students enrolled in SALT. As a freshman, she has devoted an extra 10 hours a week to meeting with tutors and her learning specialist and attending academic support workshops.

Much of what SALT taught her, Maria says, involved making concepts more visual by using color coding.

This, in turn, made her reading assignments easier to understand.

Each SALT student receives an Individual Education Plan, outlining a program of tutoring, monitoring and workshops.

Enrollment in SALT also provides students with access to the center's Writing and Math Lab. A learning specialist assigned to each student advocates and advises during weekly check-in periods.

"These innovative programs and services help students reframe how they think about learning in order to achieve success in a range of academic environments,"

says SALT Director Jeff Orgera.

To be accepted to SALT, one must go through an application process. Fees are structured, and scholarships are available.

SALT is more than a university program. It currently has five high school outreach programs in Tucson, whereby SALT learning specialists visit the schools monthly.

Lessons include learning style surveys and interest area inventories that help students identify their strengths, furthering students' postsecondary career aspirations.

"The SALT Center has altered the way I approach education and has helped me uncover my own personal learning style so I can now learn on my own," Maria says.

Her goal is to pursue a doctorate in psychology and assist students who learn differently.

As Maria knows from personal experience, there are multiple ways to learn and ultimately succeed.