

Community College of Philadelphia
Administrative Function and Support Service Audit
Learning Lab
Executive Summary

Introduction to Function /Service

Description and History

The Learning Lab was founded in 1973 at the Center City campus, partly as a result of the 1973 Middle States Association Self-Study Report which encouraged the College to institute initiatives to accommodate the increasing number of students who required instructional support systems in order to succeed academically. Presently, the Learning Lab is administered through the Division of Educational Support Services and is comprised of six physical spaces: three main campus Lab sites, and three regional center Lab locations. The Labs make use of full-time professional staff and an array of degree-holding and peer tutors. As a Department, it provides academic support to students enrolled in a variety of college courses, programs and curricula. All services are free of charge to CCP students and available six days and four evenings a week throughout the fall and spring semesters. During the summer, the Lab is open four days per week in accordance with the College's schedule.

Overview of Current Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities

The Learning Lab Audit team and the Lab faculty conducted a SWOT analysis. The results of that analysis indicated many strengths, one being that the Learning Lab is a flexible, comprehensive service Department. Its dedicated faculty strive to provide academic support for students across a wide range of disciplines utilizing an array of support models ranging from one-on-one and group tutoring to Master Student Classes and one hour per week rostered lab classes linked to Developmental Education classes. In addition the Learning Lab provides its services free of charge to students and makes those services as accessible as possible. A highlighted strength, that can become an even more important part of student support and academic discourse at the College, is the Writing

Center. Established in fall 2004, the Center averages 1,400 student contacts per semester and receives high marks from students for the service provided.

While the student satisfaction with services survey administered to 1,000 students for the 2004 Middle States Self Study indicates a high level of satisfaction, the Learning Lab continues to face challenges. One such challenge is the lack of highly qualified peer tutors across disciplines. In addition, inadequate space in the West and South labs, as well as regional centers is seen as an issue, as is a lack of funding for capital improvements. Also the low compensation rate for tutors may be an impediment to maintaining a sufficient corps of trained tutors. Further, more discipline faculty need to be made aware of the comprehensive nature of the Learning Lab services and better communication should be affected between Learning Lab faculty and classroom faculty for the rostered class experience. Finally, while the Writing Center is certainly a strength of the Learning Lab, it needs to add to its service component by becoming a significant voice in the conversations surrounding the theory and practice of writing across the Institution.

There are a number of opportunities that present themselves for improving services in the Learning Lab, which include the following: increased use of the Banner/Portal system to enhance data collection; broader communication of specific Lab services to a greater range of full-time and adjunct faculty including those recently hired; increased use of technology (both on-site and on-line) as outreach to students unable to make appointments with tutors or visit the Labs; improvement of tutor training; and, development of a more prominent “voice” for the Writing Center within the College.

The SWOT analysis also yielded a number of perceived threats, which include the following: inconsistent collaboration between Lab and classroom faculty in the rostered developmental courses; a decrease in the number of full-time students that impacts on the pool of available student tutors; an increase in the number of students needing Lab services; and, financial aid changes that decrease the number of tutors available through work study.

Activities

The Learning Lab does not keep a head count of students who make use of the services. Rather, tracking is comprised of two “contact hour” categories. The first is Individual Contacts (Tutoring). For fall 2006 (8,314 contact hours) and spring 2007 (8,359 contact hours) a total of 16,673 contact hours were documented. The second category is Group Contacts. For fall 2006 (19,733 group contact hours) and spring 2007 (15,731 group contact hours) a total of 35,464 contact hours were documented. These services are provided by 15 full-time faculty and 50 part-time faculty per semester, as well as approximately 200 peer tutors each academic year.

Within the context of those categories, the Learning Lab offers an array of support models ranging from one-on-one and group tutoring, to workshops on-line, to Master Student Classes, the Writing Center, and one hour per week rostered experiences linked to Developmental Education classes. The latter service exists for two Developmental Education programs: The College Achievement Partnership (English 089/097, and English 098/099 serving approximately 1,300 students at the main campus and regional centers) and the College Success Program (English 098/108 serving approximately 600 students on main campus), offering both a structured reading curriculum and a collaborative model to best provide learning support to classroom faculty. In addition, the Lab supports rostered classes for Act Now and the Gateway to College programs and selected sections of math 016. ESL Lab classes are scheduled for all beginning students (English 071, 081, 091) in listening, speaking, reading and writing and intermediate students (English 082 and 092). Finally, the Writing Center serves approximately 1,400 student contact hours per semester.

Mission, Goals and Objectives

Mission

The Learning Lab Department provides supplemental college-level and developmental content-based instruction across curricula, effectively assisting students in recognizing

their potential, becoming independent learners, and achieving their goals. In support of the College mission, the Learning Lab provides opportunities for student success by offering a student-centered learning experience that is guided by a personalized, structured and problem-solving approach. The External Evaluator, Dr. Deborah Moeckel, noted that “The Lab mission is consistent with the content recommended by the CAS [Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education] Standards” for learning assistance programs. However, it was also noted by the External Evaluator that “an inconsistency” appeared to exist in that the mission points to a commitment to provide support across disciplines and programs but the Lab predominately addresses the needs of developmental students.

Goals and Objectives

Goal #1: To provide supplemental activities that lead to student academic achievement.

Objectives:

- A. Expand supplemental activities across a broad spectrum and in a variety of formats based on responses to documented service needs.
- B. Initiate activities designed to enhance student self reliance, self knowledge, and ability to navigate the College and the classroom.
- C. Continue to communicate the availability of Learning Lab services to all students and use data to evaluate current and expanded services

Goal #2: To increase College-wide and external collaboration and communication in order to positively impact student persistence.

Objectives:

- A. Enhance current channels of systematic communication with faculty and staff college-wide.
- B. Enhance current channels of systematic communication with students college-wide.
- C. Intensify tracking the degree of participation of students, faculty and staff in Learning Lab activities.
- D. Improve communication and the exchange of ideas with colleagues across a variety of institutions by fuller participation in the Philadelphia-area Writing Program and Administrators (PWPA) organization.

Goal #3: To provide a personalized and supportive environment for the delivery of academic assistance services.

Objectives:

- A. Maintain facilities that are conducive to student learning.

- B. Upgrade capabilities for online tutoring.
- C. Sustain a highly qualified pool of peer tutors.
- D. Continue to encourage Learning Lab faculty participation in Professional Development activities which address the College's and their personal goals.

Performance Indicators, Measures, and Effectiveness Standards

The Audit Team utilized a variety of assessment instruments (i.e., faculty and student surveys, workshop evaluations, tutor evaluations, etc.) that indicated overall performance was highly rated. Dr. Deborah Moeckel also noted that the audit team made “extensive efforts” to collect and evaluate a variety of survey data and that the data show an overwhelmingly positive response from students and faculty. However, Dr. Moeckel asserted that the results did not constitute hard evidence of student success in academic classes as a direct result of Learning Lab interventions. The Lab staff must move from relying principally on anecdotal evidence to constructing instruments that will allow for a clearer picture of student success as a direct result of Learning Lab services.

Operating Costs and Efficiency

While the Audit Team found that College funding for Lab services has not been an issue in the past, as approximately 50% of the total \$1,666,386 budget is allocated for full-time salaries, the Team noted that capital money has not been available for three years and that physical improvement to both the South and Main labs are needed. In addition, the Lab has also lost full-time positions over the past three years. In fall 2003, there were 14 full-time faculty members; in spring 2007, there were 11 full-time members, one member on pre-retirement half-time, and one Visiting Lecturer. One of the 11 full-time members was and is serving as Director of the *Collaborative Learning Community* (CLC). As of December 30, 2006, the Lab lost both of its full-time science specialists, one due to retirement and the other due to transferring to another department. Full-time replacements for these two positions were not approved for the 2007-2008 academic

year. However, for fall 2007 approval was granted for an additional science visiting lecturer and one ESL visiting lecturer. For spring 2008 one additional science visiting lecturer position was approved.

Summation of Findings and Recommendations

Based on survey data and the findings of the External Evaluator, the Learning Lab emerges from this audit as a Department that makes a major contribution to student learning and the life of the College. Its predominant strength is the commitment of the faculty to excellent service through its various academic support venues and its adherence to the mission of providing academic support across disciplines and programs. In addition, the Writing Center is a consistently well-used resource for students across academic disciplines. Nevertheless, any department audit should welcome an examination of areas in need of improvement, and this one is not an exception.

- While the mission of the Lab is sufficiently broad, the External Evaluator noted its heavy emphasis on support for Developmental Education. One challenge for the Learning Lab staff will be to maintain services to developmental education students while expanding its services to students across the College.
- As noted in the threats section of the SWOT analysis, continued conversation around *collaboration* and the Reading Curriculum should be affected between English and Math Departments and Learning Lab faculty that would result in continuous improvement in supplemental instruction to our students. In addition, as noted by the External Evaluator, data which supports a continuation of this support model is essentially anecdotal. It will be incumbent upon both the Learning Lab and the Departments of English and Mathematics to develop explicit evidence that this model results in measurable student success.
- A current strength that can become an even more important part of student support and academic discourse at the College is the Writing Center. Established in fall 2004, the Center sees an average of 1,400 student contacts per semester and receives high marks from students for the service provided. However, to further its mission the Writing Center must add to its service component by becoming a significant voice in the conversations surrounding the theory and practice of *writing across the institution*. The Writing Center is clearly positioned to be the place from which these conversations can emanate and be sustained. Further, with the College participating in the nationwide Achieving the Dream agenda, the time

is provident for Learning Lab faculty involved with the Writing Center to begin establishing the Center as a powerful voice for writing across all College programs and curricula.

- Consistent with the evolution in teaching/learning practices, the Learning Lab needs to continue to explore technology as a resource for enhancing services. A weakness noted in both the SWOT analysis and the External Evaluator's report is the shortage of tutors due to the difficulty of securing tutors via faculty referral for specific disciplines and the low hourly pay rate. In addition, the student surveys indicate that students did not "have time" to visit the Lab for face-to-face services. While technology is not always the answer nor is it always the best form of active instruction, software programs and devices such as podcasting and web-based instruction have become more sophisticated over the years and increased use may be efficacious in solving the tutor shortage problem while at the same time enhancing service.
- Improved training for the peer tutors must be a priority. For the Learning Lab to affect a sound program, it will be necessary to provide these (mostly young) students with the tools they need to do an effective job.
- Additional technology and physical plant issues should be addressed by the Learning Lab.
 - Take full advantage of the reporting capabilities of the College's new operating system, SCT Banner. These capabilities would include improved data collection for assessment purposes.
 - Update the Lab's appointment process via electronic scheduling with scanning ID cards using the College's new operating system.
 - Improve the physical space in all three main campus labs.
 - Consider consolidating the West and South Labs.

In addition to the findings of the Audit Team, the External Evaluator found considerable strength in the commitment of the Lab faculty and staff, the College's overall investment in academic support service to students, the Labs relationships with other areas of the College, and the belief in the mission of the Lab. However, in summarizing the weaknesses she perceived, Dr. Moeckel wrote, "the organizational and administrative structures of Lab operations have resulted from evolution of these structures over time, rather than from evidence driven decision-making. The result is a de-centralized operation which is costly to operate and for which there is little hard evidence of the substantial quantity of positive results that most people anecdotally feel to be true and valid." Given this assessment, it is a priority to examine the kind of student success evidence collected and the potential use of this data.

Implementation Timeline

Mission

- The Learning Lab Department will examine its current mission statement, amend it if/as appropriate and forward it to the Chair and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs for approval by the end of the spring 2008 semester. In light of the collaborative nature of its work, the Department's mission should clearly articulate its unique position within the Institution and its leadership role in fostering and supporting the conversations and practices designed to improve student learning outcomes. Once adopted, the mission must be effectively communicated to all faculty in all disciplines such that they will come to recognize and draw upon the Lab for the resource it is.

Rostered Lab Classes

- The Learning Lab and English Department Chairs began a renewed discussion around the definition of *collaboration* in fall 2007. As a result of these discussions, a statement and an agreement has been jointly issued by the Department Chairs during the spring 2008 semester. The objective of this joint effort is to both clearly define the roles of faculty in both departments and to show that *collaboration* is supported by both Chairs. A similar undertaking with Math Department will commence in fall 2008. In addition, both the Learning Lab faculty and Math and English Department Chairs will jointly design more direct, evidence-based assessments to determine if rostered lab classes offer a distinct cost-effective academic advantage for students. This effort will be engaged during fall 2008. Finally, the Reading Curriculum alternative to direct collaboration will similarly be assessed commencing fall 2008.

Writing Center

- The Director of Writing Center will examine and expand its current role in the Learning Lab and College. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, it could be leading the College's *Writing Across the Curriculum* effort. The Writing Center Director has been charged by the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Lab Department Head with clearly defining the direction the Writing Center needs to take for the future in communication with key colleagues across the Institution. Discussions among the Writing Center Director, Department Head and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs will begin spring 2008 and continue through the summer. New directives will be implemented in fall 2008.

Tutoring

- In conjunction with Academic Computing, the Learning Lab will address the need for enhancements to its services. To be explored are: *live* online tutoring (first by faculty and then by peer tutors), as well as new forms of support media. Implementation is projected for fall 2008.

- The Learning Lab will increase its efforts to secure a pool of qualified tutors by expanding its recruiting efforts, recommending an amendment to the tutor pay scale and taking a more formal approach to tutor training. A proposal for accomplishing this will be forwarded to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs in spring 2008.
 - While continuing to target departments by email and letter for referrals, beginning spring 2008, Lab faculty will be more proactive in reaching out to Department Heads and by making themselves immediately available to attend various department meetings. Commencing spring 2008 semester, ads will be placed in the Vanguard, on CCP's cable television channel, and posted via flyers throughout the various campuses.
 - By the end of summer II 2008, a proposal requesting and justifying an increase in the hourly rate for both CCP and non-CCP peers tutors will be presented to the ESS Division Dean.
 - Development of a more formal tutor training program has already begun utilizing the revised Tutor Training Manual. Commencing immediately, new and existing tutors will be given a hard copy of the manual and access to it online. A training schedule for all tutors beginning spring 2008 has been developed by the tutor coordinator and Department Chair. These training sessions will be on specific topics or facets of the tutoring experience, such as recognizing learning disabilities or different learning styles, and will be tailored to the tutor's discipline area. An evaluation of the initial training sessions by the tutor coordinator and the Chair will be done at the end of the spring 2008 semester. Based on that evaluation, a definitive schedule will be implemented fall 2008. In addition, to begin fall 2008, each tutor will be assigned a full-time faculty mentor according to subject areas. Exploration of offering a recognized tutor-certification program will commence simultaneously with these changes.

Technology & Physical Plant

- In conjunction with IT, scheduling appointments via scanning IDs (a test is scheduled for spring 2008), electronic recording of Lab class attendance (also scheduled for spring 2008) and most significantly a better use of Banner to assess *student outcomes* will be implemented.
- During spring of 2008 a review of physical space will be conducted by the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Learning Lab Department Head. The review will encompass both space allocation and renovation.

Assessment

- The Learning Lab faculty as a matter of ongoing review will closely examine the report of the External Evaluator, Dr. Moeckel, and the recommendations contained therein. While Dr. Moeckel noted that the audit team made "extensive efforts" to collect and evaluate a variety of survey data and that the data show an overwhelmingly positive response from students and faculty, she asserted that the results did not constitute hard evidence of student success in academic classes as a

direct result of Learning Lab interventions. This recurrent theme throughout her report both challenges and compels the Learning Lab to shift its assessment practices to a *student outcomes* model. In response to Dr. Moeckel's report, conversations initiated by the Learning Lab Department Chair will begin in spring 2008 (to be completed by the end of August 2008) to develop an assessment plan that aligns evidence of student success directly with services offered.