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Table of Contents

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In order to realize their academic missions and respond to state demands for access, assessment, and accountability, the nation's community colleges, along with all other institutions of higher education, are focusing increasingly on the enhancement of academic support services. Learning centers are being used on two- and four-year campuses alike to test students at entry, provide learning assistance supplementary to the classroom, and retest students to demonstrate their acquisition of basic skills. The current emphasis on documenting institutional outcomes, however, requires that colleges document the acquisition of higher order skills. Learning centers will need, therefore, to reconfigure from a predominantly remedial mode serving the

underprepared to a more comprehensive mode serving all students.

In addition to discussing some common learning center models, this digest calls for further inquiry into the conceptual bases upon which successful learning centers are predicated and looks at roles learning centers may play in the future.

LEARNING CENTER MODELS

Learning centers exist in various forms under various names on different campuses. They share the goal of assisting students to become more efficient and effective learners and typically provide tutorial assistance in academic fields, learning skill development, and instructional resources, including computers and software (Lauridsen, 1980). Garner's 1980 vision of the comprehensive community college learning assistance center incorporated an individualized program of basic skills instruction, a comprehensive delivery mechanism to aid handicapped students from identification to job placement, and library and audiovisual services. Currently, three models are most common: learning resource center based programs, discipline-based support centers, and stand-alone learning centers.

Learning Resource Centers (LRC'S). More has been written about the LRC or library-based format than any other learning center model. In a 1988 survey of 1,276 community colleges by the Community and Junior College Libraries Section of the Association of Research Libraries, 38% of the 336 respondents stated that their libraries performed as learning centers (Dubin, 1988). The survey also revealed that 35% offered remedial assistance; 33% provided computer labs; 27% made instructional design services available to faculty; and 23.5% provided tutorial services.

As reported in the literature, the learning resource center tends to emphasize two main functions (Arp and Kenny, 1990; Pohrte, 1990; Raufman and Others, 1990). The first, not surprisingly, is the provision of traditional research, reference, and bibliographic support to students and faculty. The second is the use of non-print media to bolster learning, especially through in-house and distance telecourse instruction. A third form of involvement represented to a lesser extent in the literature is the provision of developmental and literacy education, especially through computer-assisted instruction and tutorial support (Raufman, and Others, 1990).

Discipline-Based Support Centers. The vast majority of American colleges and universities provide some sort of structured learning assistance to their students. Though the literature suggests that the discipline-oriented academic support model is found more often at senior institutions, specialized academic support structures exist at some two-year colleges as well. Two examples are the algebra and calculus microcomputer laboratory at De Anza College, relying heavily on carefully monitored computer-based instruction, with the computer functioning as tutor and skills builder (Avery, 1985) and the Life Science Learning Center at Los Angeles Valley College, providing a more comprehensive learning assistance environment in which learning

requirements can be diagnosed and individual needs provided for at remedial, reinforcement, and enrichment levels (Samuels, 1984).

Stand-Alone Learning Centers. Stand-alone centers are independent or quasi-independent units which are not extensions of other institutional functions such as libraries or student services programs. At two-year colleges, stand-alone centers tend to focus primarily but not exclusively upon the remedial and developmental needs of that part of an open-access population most deficient in basic and study skills. For example, the South Plains College Learning Center provides a full-range of academic support, including assessment of entry-level skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; compensatory courses in these skill areas; tutoring; an independent learning lab; and miscellaneous services such as study skills seminars, student success courses, writing and math labs, and tutor training activities (Platt, 1987). Though most of the center's clients are underprepared students, the South Plains Center reaches further into the general student population than the typical learning center through the use of an independent study laboratory. Using electronic media, microcomputers, and over 600 software programs, it offers all students the opportunity to advance through a knowledge base ranging in complexity from basic grammar to organic chemistry.

APPLICATION OF LEARNING THEORY

Efforts to establish a new learning center or to expand and consolidate the range of services currently provided should have a solid theoretical foundation. In some colleges, mastery learning theory underpins the work of the learning center, while others implement andragogical approaches or focus on learning styles assessment and accommodation.
A notable example in terms of a clearly defined conceptual basis is the "Tenore plan" employed at Bunker Hill Community College in the 1980's. This plan incorporated a hierarchy of learning objectives, assessment of learning styles, a systems approach to course development corresponding to student learning styles, and delivery modes compatible with a variety of learning styles without preference for one over another (Tenore and Dunbar, 1979). The "Tenore plan" offered a learning center-based approach to individualized remedial and college-level instruction based on learning style assessment.

The Tenore model may warrant further scrutiny, in terms of both theory and implementation, as all sectors of higher education gear up to respond to the growing demand for outcomes assessment in the 1990's, and the consequent need to extend learning assistance beyond the remedial and developmental. Learning centers will be challenged to offer more comprehensive services to a broader range of learners than ever before.

The learning center of the 1990's should incorporate:

- *reinforcement and enrichment activities for students in college-level courses, especially those using computer-assisted, audiovisual, interactive video, and other resources;
- *testing services to assess students' entry-level skills, learning styles, career aptitudes and interests; to provide make-up testing for all classes; and to measure a variety of learning outcomes;
- *instruction in library and research skills;
- *print and non-print resources for telecourses and other forms of distance education;
- *tutorial services for students seeking academic enrichment, as well as those experiencing academic difficulty in any course;
- *a full range of services for underprepared college students, commencing with skills assessment at entry, basic skills courses, self-paced individualized instruction, and exit testing following the completion of developmental coursework or activities;
- *supplementary instruction for all students in such areas as speed reading, critical reading, study skills, college survival skills, and time management; and
- *individualized self-paced learning.

In the meantime, the literature about existing learning centers does not do justice to the broad scope of the activities currently being undertaken on the nation's campuses related to learning assistance. This is a serious omission at a time when we need to learn more from each other about what works well with a diverse group of learners and why these practices succeed.

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