The Impact of Learning Assistance Experience on Teaching Pedagogy

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Abstract

Many administrators in Learning Assistance Programs (LAPs) have teaching duties, or take on teaching duties at some point in their careers. This study was designed to examine the impact of LAP experience on classroom pedagogy. A pilot study was utilized first through listservs and email chains to ask that question of LAP professionals. After significant results in the pilot (all 27 respondents evidenced an important impact of LAP experience on pedagogy), a larger, mixed methods survey design was constructed and administered to participants in a wide variety of settings. The results in a representative sample (n = 66) again were consistent: LAP administrators believe their learning support experience has significantly impacted their classroom experiences and pedagogical abilities in positive ways. Taken together with a general lack of teaching instruction in graduate school, as well as the blurred lines between teaching and administrating within some campus roles, this study suggests that LAP administrators also perceive themselves to be undervalued as a resource on campus, and that their teaching experiences should be utilized more effectively.

Keywords: learning assistance programs (LAPs), administrators, mixed methods, survey research, teaching, pedagogy

Learning Assistance Experience and Teaching in Higher Education

Learning Assistance Programs (LAPs) are commonplace on campuses, and there are now thousands of LAP administrators around the county. Despite their having a strong background in

educational theory and very often classroom experience, LAP administrators are not always seen as "teaching faculty" or as having the same pedagogical expertise as full-time faculty. Yet, given that headlines continue to demonstrate that regular faculty themselves are often underprepared for teaching duties (see, for example, "Study: Teaching and Research Not Tied" by Emily Tate (2017), "Teaching Professors to Become Better Teachers" by John Hanc (2016), or "Fear of Looking Stupid" by David Matthews (2017), LAP administrators may constitute a valuable underutilized resource.

Complicating matters, LAP administrators are often seen on one side of the administration/faculty or faculty/staff divide, which in some instances limits the structural pedagogical opportunities they may have. This divide which continues to be omnipresent at many educational institutions of higher learning is a long-standing and pervasive phenomenon that impacts how ownership of pedagogy is perceived. Faculty, charged with instructing their students, may very well own the realm of instruction on campus in curricular terms, but whether or not they have a strong grasp of pedagogy and can work with individual students effectively is an ongoing debate. As Adams (2002) points out, not all graduate students have the same quantity or quality of teaching experience:

> Some graduate students have no teaching experience; others have served as a teaching assistant in a couple of different courses; some have taught labs or discussion sections; others have taught a single course, and a few have independently taught several courses. (p. 3)

In order to address this, in 1993 The Preparing Future Faculty program was created by the AAC&U and CGS to outline model programs and curricula to prepare graduate students for careers as faculty (Adams, 2002).

This conversation continues today. In 2012, for example, Harvard held a conference kick-off event for a new Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching; as Berrett (2012) points out, the conference content "suggests a growing concern at even the most elite institutions that the classroom experience is not all it could be" (para. 8). Such a need holds with findings from other studies surveying faculty about the need for pedagogical

instruction (Robinson & Hope, 2013), reviewing literature on faculty preparedness at community colleges (Lail, 2009), and interviewing doctoral candidates (Austin, 2002). Even when faculty have instruction in pedagogy, it may not be adequate; Maynard, Labuzienski, Lind, Berglund, and Albright (2017) analyzed 24 doctoral social work programs that required courses in teaching from their instructors, but noted that "very few syllabi specifically referenced teaching methods or models that have some empirical support, such as team-based learning or problem-based learning" (p. 106). Likewise, in a 2001 survey of doctoral students enrolled at 27 institutions in 11 disciplines, Golde and Dore (2001) found that there is a "mismatch between the purpose of doctoral education, aspirations of the students, and the realities of their careers," noting that the focus is on research at the expense of learning about pedagogy or advising roles of faculty. Indeed, citing the National Research Council (2000), Andrews, Leonard, Colgrove, and Kalinowski (2011) argue that without formal instruction in theories like Constructivism, "the active-learning exercises an instructor uses may have superficial similarities to exercises described in the literature, but may lack constructivist elements necessary for improving learning" (p. 400). Though Andrews et al. (2011) did not find that faculty use of active learning pedagogy positively correlated with student gains, the researchers did find a strong correlation between the faculty's explanation of student misconceptions, as well as faculty use of active learning to change misconceptions. Such a finding underscores the importance of understanding learning theory in the execution of any pedagogical strategy.

Again, though faculty are truly the most prominent practitioners of pedagogy on campus, they are not the only ones with expertise in such matters. While LAP administrators generally work in the following types of programs: tutoring programs, developmental education, mentoring programs, disability support, supplemental instruction, English Second Language services (ESL), retention programs, first year advising, and other related activities, almost all LAP administrators either directly or indirectly (supervising others) work with students in a variety of one-on-one, small group, and skills-oriented settings, including formal classrooms in some

cases. Very often, the practices of LAP professionals are indeed the application of learning theories; for instance, the theoretical framework of tutoring includes such concepts as constructivism, scaffolding, metacognition, and active learning (Sheets, 2012; Dvorak, 2004). Such proficiencies clearly overlap to a great degree with skillsets associated with effective postsecondary instruction, and can include such well-known techniques as active learning, problem-based learning, individualized or differentiated instruction, re-teaching material in different formats, and multi-sensory learning, to name just a few (Trammell, 2005). Adams (2005) points out that faculty are increasingly asked to develop curricula for general education that emphasizes "multicultural, international, interdisciplinary, and service learning...Yet, these issues and aspects of teaching are usually ignored in graduate programs" (p. 3). In addition, LAP professionals are often trained in action research techniques which often produce innovative pedagogy in the classroom and involve very practical interventions (Jaaskela & Nissila, 2015; Keen Wong, 2014).

Furthermore, because one of the primary charges or learning centers is student success and retention, the actions of the center are driven by scholarship which itself tends to focus on the student as an individual. This focus on the individual therefore not only drives the programming in the center, but it may also inform the LAP professionals' choice of pedagogy. As Tinto (1975, 1993) first pointed out, a student's sense of belonging is essential in their performance in school and decision to remain enrolled. Indeed, in accordance with Piaget's understanding that knowledge is socially constructed, a focus on the individual learner has long been a hallmark of learning centers in all of their work, from tutoring (Dvorak, 2001) to academic coaching (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010) to work in first-year seminars (Latino and Unite, 2012). The importance of student belonging created through personal contact with faculty and administrators is tied to academic progress (Meeuwisse et al., 2010) and retention (O'Keeffe, 2013). While an important caveat here is that many services in learning centers are peer-led, the LAP is very rarely without student contact.

Despite this rich experience, faculty members have long seen learning assistance program (LAP) educators as "administrators," and not primarily as teachers or teaching faculty. The implication of this

label "administrator" is that LAP educators do not understand the roles and business of faculty. As a result, many LAP administrators have felt undervalued by faculty colleagues or under-appreciated for their educational and pedagogical skillsets since they are most closely associated with the LAPs on campus and often do not enjoy faculty rank. Many administrators in Learning Assistance Programs (LAPs) also have some teaching duties or take on teaching duties at some point in their careers. Many are full-time teaching faculty at some point in their careers, or ultimately strive to be for various reasons including possibly the enhanced academic prestige, but also because they enjoy teaching and working with students.

This study began with the premise that the role of an LAP professional develops the very same skills necessary for teaching, which may make LAP professionals beneficial to their faculty peers who may come to the profession underprepared for teaching. This study attempted to understand more closely the LAP administrators' perceptions of their teaching experiences through the following questions:

- Do administrators who work in LAPs gain useful pedagogical skills as a direct result of their LAP experience? (The literature review suggested they do)
- Do administrators who work in LAPs perceive themselves as better teachers as a result of their LAP experience? (The pilot indicated that they do)
- Does the faculty/staff divide or other related factors result in an underappreciation of LAP administrators' teaching and pedagogical skills? (The pilot results suggested this might be the case)

The primary research for this study began by pilot surveying several dozen LAP colleagues and asking them some of these basic questions, then correlating the responses. The pilot results were profound in their consistency of reported issues to the point of suggesting that a richer and more in-depth study should be done.

To determine the best avenue for future study, a half dozen in-depth interviews were then conducted with key informants from the pilot group to determine if there was a greater specificity to the perceptions, understand the lexicon, and to develop preliminary

ideas about what survey or future interview questions might be. As a result of this process, a more formal survey was developed, which ultimately became the Learning Assistance Experience and Impact on Pedagogy (LAEIP) Survey (See Appendix).

The informal pilot and subsequent interviews quickly revealed that many LAP professionals considered their teaching to be greatly enhanced (or potentially enhanced, if they weren't currently teaching) by their LAP experience (Trammell, 2016). Typical of comments are these reactions shared by respondents and then transcribed:

> I know that what I learned as a Supplemental Instruction leader in undergrad has had a profound impact on how I run my class… Once you understand how students learn then how could you ever go back to the "sage on the stage"?

> I feel as though my prior experiences impact the work I do today because I am a firm believer in the value of differentiated instruction and intentional curricular design that includes culturally relevant pedagogical practices and an emphasis on social justice.

> Working as a tutor taught me first and foremost the value of being an active listener, guiding students to develop their own lines of inquiry.

The respondents in the pilot phase ($n = 27$) all made strong claims that their learning assistance experience had significantly impacted their pedagogical skills in a positive direction. With rich pilot results indicative of themes and lines of inquiry, the work to design a larger, more complete investigation proceeded accordingly.

Method

Participants

After completion of the pilot interviews and informal surveys ($n = 27$), learning assistance professionals were recruited to complete a more extensive online survey by advertising on five common LAP listservs: LRNASST-L, FYE-LIST, TYE-LIST, SINET,

trio-sss, and wcenter. Snowball sampling was also used with pilot participants. Survey Monkey was utilized to host the online survey. IRB application resulted in exemption for the project. Three separate email calls over the course of a six-month period were used to maximize participation. Ultimately, sixty-six participants successfully completed the survey; roughly a dozen were respondents from the original pilot.

To establish baseline reliability and validity parameters, the sample population demographics in the study ($n = 66$) were compared closely to membership demographics information from one of the largest professional organizations in the field of learning assistance, the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). Simple t-tests (on gender, for example, with no significant statistical differences) and other meaningful comparisons (nature of home institutions; public/private; four year/two year; etc.) were conducted to ensure that the sample population was reflective of the general learning assistance staff population.

The respondents were representative of a variety of roles and levels of experience in learning assistance programs, ranging from veteran learning center directors to new faculty in developmental education, and all roles and levels of experience in-between. The complete demographics for the study ($n = 66$) and a comparison to the membership in one of the largest professional organizations are reported in the results section.

Materials and Procedure

The final LAEIP survey consisted of nineteen items; the first six were demographic in nature, and the remainder consisted of a variety of open-ended questions, Likert-type items, and checklists from which to select responses. Several of the questions subtly asked for similar types of information to enhance internal reliability. The survey followed other classic design elements such as determining a specific sampling frame, and using pilot results and elements confirmed in the literature to revise or include questions (Fowler, 2002; Kalton, 1983). The mixture of items was intentional, allowing for some aspects to be analyzed quantitatively, and for others to be reported more qualitatively in participants' own words, because survey research has traditionally worked effectively in mixed methods

designs. Later, the survey results were checked for instrument sensitivity (allowing enough room for variation but not too much for purposes of defining constructs) and other internal measures of reliability that would be consistent with the results of the earlier "critical systematic review" (Fowler, 2002, p. 108).

Although the content of the survey was initially determined by a pilot survey and the subsequent interviews, it was also reinforced by a review of the literature suggesting that postsecondary instructors are often undertrained and ill-prepared for the classroom. The popular education media, in fact, has reported on this phenomenon for some time, and this reinforced the need for such research to see what kind of pedagogical impact learning assistance actually has on classroom effectiveness (Brandzel, 2017; Patel, 2017; Weimer, 2017). In many cases, innovative pedagogy in higher education may be found in unexpected places that can benefit all classroom instruction (Griess & Keat, 2014); this research in part examined whether LAP administrators are or can be utilized in that role.

The development of the survey followed best practices. First, language used in the development of this survey deliberately tried to mitigate the self-selection bias skew towards a positive response. For example, neutral phrasing of "impacted" was used to ask about the effect of LAP experience on teaching rather than "benefited." Further, the techniques and terminology of the LAEIP survey were developed directly from the pilot results and the literature on effective LAP administration and effective pedagogy in higher education. For instance, question 8 asked about LAP experience impact on: Understanding individual student learning needs, Embracing diversity of learners, Critiquing own instruction, Designing instruction differently, Designing assessment differently, and Working more with pacing, etc. In another question (16), pedagogical skills were framed as: Seeing how much students can struggle, Understanding developmental aspects of student progress, Seeing students underachieve in spite of working hard, Understanding systematic barriers for some students at the school, and Seeing how characteristics of instructors impact different students. And finally, in question 17, classroom strategies were framed as knowledge of: Active Learning, Service Learning, Flipped

Classroom, Group Learning, and Discussion.

Using snowballing sampling from five common LAP listservs over a period of three months, responses were collected through Survey Monkey (Kalton, 1983). Statistical analysis using basic descriptive statistics and some comparison of means for responses was completed using SPSS and a qualitative analysis was completed using open coding.

Results

The demographics of the respondents (n = 66) were consistent with historic profile of learning assistance in higher education (ASHE, 2010). A majority (86.4%) of the respondents identified as female gendered, while only 13.6% identified as male gendered. Although LAP administration has shifted toward greater gender balance in the recent decades, female gendered administrators still represent the overall majority of LAP administrators in higher education. Many respondents viewed their experience through a developmental education perspective as opposed to more traditional lecture style pedagogies. More than half the respondents were educated through the master's level, again very consistent with learning assistance history and practice.

Age and level of education are reported in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

Table 1
Responses to Item 2, "What is you age?" (n = 66)

Category	Number	Percentage
18 to 24	2	3%
25 to 34	6	9%
35 to 44	21	32%
45 to 54	17	26%
55 to 64	15	23%
65 to 74	5	7%
75 or older	0	---
Choose not to answer	0	---
TOTAL	66	100%

Table 2

Responses to Item 3, "What is your highest level of education?" (n = 66)

Category	Number	Percentage
4 year undergraduate	5	8%
Master's of equivalent	39	59%
Part of PhD/EdD or equivalent	12	18%
PhD/EdD or equivalent	9	14%
Other (please specify)	1	1%
TOTAL	66	100%

Age and education responses were consistent with the shifting demographics of LAP administrators trending toward younger professionals entering the profession, and LAP administrators tending to be more highly educated in recent decades. The sample was also representative of types of institutions with LAPs in higher education including 4 year public schools (28%), 4 year private schools (38%), and 2 year public schools (community colleges) (32%), the three of which represented 98% of the sample.

Respondents also worked in a wide variety of LAP settings, which is reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Responses to Item 5, "Primary LAP area of most recent responsibility (you can check more than one)" (n = 66)

Category	Number	Percentage
Tutoring program	43	65.2%
Mentoring program	10	15.2%
Disability support	10	15.2%
Learning center/academic center	44	66.7%
Developmental education	4	6.1%
Reading or writing	14	21.2%
Other	10	15.2%

Fully two-thirds of all participants identified as having a primary administrative role in a learning center or academic center; nearly two-thirds identified as being closely associated with tutoring programs. This data is again consistent with the history of LAPs and

those who have been hired to administer them (ASHE, 2010).

Item 6 in the survey asked respondents about the best characterization of their teaching duties, selecting all statements that applied. Nearly half (48.5%) reported that they currently teach part-time; 6% reported that they currently teach full-time. Exactly half (50%) reported that they had taught in the past, and 15% that they plan to teach in the near future. Taken in summary, this sample represents a significant amount of teaching, with the vast majority of it being part-time.

Following that, respondents indicated on a seven point scale that their work in a LAP setting has had a profound effect on their teaching practices (mean = 6.22, n = 65). Nearly half or 49.2% of respondents (n = 32) rated this response with the highest numeric score possible (i.e. 7). Later, comments on open-ended items fully confirmed this important data.

Respondents were asked to specify the kinds of impact LAP experience has on pedagogy, which is reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Responses to Item 8, "Ways LAP experience has impacted the most" (n = 65)

Category	Number	Percentage
Understanding individual student learning needs	56	86.1%
Embracing diversity of learners	37	56.9%
Critiquing own instruction	43	66.2%
Designing instruction differently	51	78.5%
Designing assessment differently	34	52.3%
Working with more pacing	17	26.2%
Other (please specify)	4	6.2%

The two highest reported categories, Understanding individual student learning needs and Designing instruction differently, are two skillsets that are commonly not taught in non-Education graduate programs, and are therefore more likely to be valued coming out of a LAP experience. After rating the impact LAP has had on their past, present or future teaching, participants were asked to specify the impact. The results in Table 4 reflect aggregate responses, irrespective of the participant's impact rating.

To ascertain the importance of teaching to their roles as LAP professionals, regardless of being assigned a course load, Item 9 asked respondents to weigh on a seven point scale how much their LAP experience was about administering centers as opposed to actually teaching students and working with them. The response (mean = 4.83, n = 65) indicated that the perception was skewed significantly (almost two standard deviations) to the teaching side of the equation, indicating that LAP professionals in this sample see their jobs as being more focused on interacting with students than performing administrative duties.

Item 10 which followed then asked to what extent respondents felt their experience interacting with students and teaching could be valuable to their full-time faculty colleagues. Again using a seven point scale, the respondents indicated quite strongly (*mean* = 6.29, *n* = 66) that they believed their experience could be extremely valuable to their full-time teaching colleagues, with more than half (54.5%) rating the item the highest possible score (i.e. 7).

Respondents were asked in Item 11 about what their teaching choice would be if they had flexibility in the future: 57.6% responded that they would choose to teach more; 13.6% would choose to teach less. If the self-assessed values of the LAP professionals' understanding of pedagogy as a result of their experience is correct (questions 7 and 10), then together with LAP professionals' willingness to serve more suggests they are underutilized. However, it is not known, of course, if the LAP professionals themselves meet the requisites for any given course offering on a campus. Even admitting this, however, one could see how the LAP professionals' understanding of pedagogy and willingness to teach could perhaps be aligned with faculty development offerings which both capitalizes on the underutilized resource of LAP as educator and meets the need (as discussed in the review of the literature) of faculty development.

Item 12 asked respondents if they thought that typical full-time teaching faculty were trained enough in pedagogy, course design, and assessment. Nearly 9 in 10 respondents in this sample believed that faculty are not trained enough in those critical areas; more than half (51.5%) said the answer was no, faculty are not prepared enough for teaching, and over one third responded that faculty are prepared

"not at all" (34.9%). The results echo previous studies of faculty preparedness (Maynard et al., 2017; Robinson & Hope, 2013; Berett, 2012; Lail, 2009; Adams, 2002;Austin, 2002).

Items 13 (*n* = 63), 15 (*n* = 52), 18 (*n* = 53), and 19 (*n* = 29) were open-ended questions that allowed for longer narrative responses. They asked about classroom experiences and interactions with full-time faculty colleagues, and will be discussed more fully in the following discussion section.

Item 14 asked if respondents believed that they were better instructors as a result of their LAP experiences. Fully two thirds (66.7%) responded "yes," and another 25.8% as "probably." No one chose the answer "probably not." A small group (6.6%) chose "other," usually meaning that they were different in some way as a result of the experience. This is a high percentage of respondents answering in the overall affirmative, although the nature of study did have a self-selection bias that could also be manifested here. However, the survey was designed with this in mind, and attempted to use language that didn't presuppose a positive response.

Item 16 asked respondents to rank five items from the most impactful to the least impactful, as they related to LAP experience when teaching (seeing how much students can struggle; understanding developmental aspects of student progress; seeing students underachieve in spite of working hard; understanding systemic barriers for some students at the school; seeing how characteristics of instructors impact different students). A simple t-test with an expected value of 3 (the mean score of randomly rating 5 items 1 through 5) revealed no significant difference in rankings (*p* < .05), demonstrating that the respondents share belief in relatively equal levels of importance for the items.

Item 17 asked respondents to rate the likelihood of using certain techniques as a result of their LAP experience on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being more likely. Respondents were much more likely, for example, to use active learning techniques as a result of their LAP experience. The results are reported below in Table 5.

Table 5

Responses to Item 17, "Rate the likelihood of using this technique as a result of LAP experience"

Category	Number	Mean
Active Learning	66	4.65
Service Learning	66	2.88
Flipped Classroom	65	3.49
Group Learning	66	4.12
Discussion	65	4.48

Discussion

The open-ended response items in the survey offered an opportunity for respondents to enrich their answers and provide concrete examples of how their teaching is informed by their LAP experience. Item 13, for example, asked respondents to give a brief example or anecdote that illustrated how their LAP experience has impacted their instruction. Thirty-seven participants (56%) responded to item 13. Two of the responses were removed from analysis as they were not anecdotes. In an analysis of the responses, 8 major thematic impacts were observed: understanding students (11 responses), change in classroom strategies (10 responses), integration of study skills/metacognition (8 responses), alteration of assessments or assignments (4 responses), improved feedback mechanisms (3 responses), prioritization of outcomes (1 response), and reading additional theory (1 response). Therefore, the largest impacts observed and reported by participants centered around understanding students (31.4%), followed by change in classroom strategies to a more inclusive and active environment (28.6%), and the integration of study skills and metacognition (22.8%). A sample of the responses provides evidence of the impact:

> I think more carefully about comments I make on student writing, and I am less likely to assume reasons for students' poor performance.

> Using many different methods to convey the same topic, and allowing students to experience to use what they are learning in a 'real world' application.

Understanding how learning occurs, and creating environments that can facilitate learning. Specifically, utilizing active learning classroom techniques (students and teacher are equally engaged in the class/content).

In the "old days" I would rely heavily on text-based assignment sheets, papers and reading, and not varied teaching strategies. Now I incorporate many more activities, presentations, and small group work.

Due to my LAP experiences, I am more able to embrace and understand the characteristics of "at-risk" learners and see students as individuals not just as a whole class. I also know how to build relationship and purposefully incorporate these elements into the entire teaching continuum from syllabus design to grading and more. In my LAP work, I hear and understand common student concerns about their classes and instructors and am able to plan to minimize these in my own classroom.

I taught a college success class, and always invited my students to arrive 10 minutes early to class to discuss challenges they were facing that impacted their ability to be successful. Rather than telling them what to do, I encouraged them to talk out their problems and help each other. This idea came from observing peer tutors and tutees understanding and supporting one another in our learning center. This helped students build relationships with one another, which is so important to retention in a commuter, community college.

Item 15 asked respondents about a time when something happened in class and they recognized that it connected back to LAP experience. Fifty-two (52) participants responded to this question; 20 responses indicated that they could not think of a particular instance, though some of these also indicated that they had not taught recently which may be a factor. Another possibility

for the number of negative responses is that participants felt such information was included in the previous question asking for an anecdote demonstrating impact and did not have an additional one to share. Two participants said that they could not recall a particular time but noted that it had certainly been impactful, one saying "every class." Thirty (30) responses, therefore were able to be analyzed for this question. In these 30 responses, 5 themes emerged: increased awareness of students' needs (18 responses), increased study skill use (6 responses), increased awareness and utilization of resources on campus (4 responses), shift in role to facilitator not lecturer (3 responses), and focus on group work (1 response). Analysis of the qualitative responses indicated that LAP professionals have been impacted strongly with regards to their understanding of the student body and their needs, which is also reflected in the quantitative analysis discussed above. That using study skills in the classroom was the second most noted impact of LAP experience on participants' teaching was unsurprising, given that study skills are so pervasive in any LAP, regardless of its focus or size. A sampling of some responses to illustrate these findings follows:

> Yes, several years ago I was facilitating a classroom discussion on Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. As students began to discuss their perceptions of the author's experiences, I noticed a change in body language in one of my students. I treaded [sic] gingerly, but asked if she would like to share what she was feeling. It turns out that she had experienced a harrowing escape from Liberia during the civil war after suffering the loss of her father and other family members. I immediately felt the change in energy in the room as the class responded to their classmate and thanked her for sharing her perspective. I credit my experiences as a learning professional for teaching me how to respond to sensitive situations and for teaching me how to create safe spaces for learning.

> Working in the Academic Advising Center means I am also tied into the resources on campus. In my Seminar

classes, I have nontraditional (more than 3 years out of HS) students that include Veterans, older students, students with other responsibilities, etc. Several times, I have had students dealing with PTSD, addiction issues, and general anxiety & depressive disorders. My job has given me the connections on campus to get these students the assistance they need with a simple phone call. When I was solely an adjunct (or Non-tenure track instructors as they call them here), I didn't know about the resources, never mind who the best offices/people were to call to help students in need. Having those connections with Student Support and Success service offices allows me to be more aware of how to support student needs. It has also given me the opportunity to rethink how to teach to different learning styles and abilities, particularly if being successful in college is being hampered by what's going on outside the classroom.

Following the needs of students - at midterms, I ask students what other information they need/want to cover (that hasn't been addressed yet this semester or something they need more information on), and adjust the semester schedule accordingly to match those needs.

Many times. Even just thinking in terms of student development (Chickering) or andragogy (Knowles) provides a base for considering learning factors. Also, training tutors on information processing, neuroscience of learning, and the role of social interaction shifts the thinking about teaching toward really planning for learning.

I had a student who sat at the back of the class (hat on, looked bored). The next class period I moved everyone around and focused on students connecting with other learners as we discussed content. By the end of the semester, this freshman was contributing to class regularly.

> Yes. Being relevant is crucial [to understanding students]. When you see students not participating, you begin to question approach. I co-facilitated a course this semester, and what I noticed is that relevance was required. Once students made that connection to the instructor, participation and engagement resulted.

To further assess the value LAP may have for their institutions, item 18 asked what advice respondents would give to their full-time teaching colleagues. Seventeen participants responded to this section meaningfully (10 additional participants responded with "no" or N/A). Of these 17 responses, 9 thanked the researchers for investigating LAP impact, indicating, perhaps, a strong desire to be validated and appreciated on their campuses for their knowledge in the pedagogical arena. No other strong themes emerged. A short sample follows:

> Understanding students, and how they learn, can increase the efficacy of your teaching. It helps in all stages from designing syllabi, building lectures, and crafting assignments--even (and perhaps especially) in giving feedback.

> Don't make assumptions about your students, don't be vague in expressing your expectations of students, don't give them unclear assignments or 'extra' reading.

> Understanding how to increase student levels of processing is important to teaching. You cannot just teach information without showing students how to process it outside of the classroom.

> I'm a big promoter of reflection and metacognition in my classrooms. It is such an important, yet often overlooked, skill. Students having insight about their learning process helps them, but if they can share that with the professor, it also is great feedback for the professor. I would encourage profs to incorporate reflection into their curriculum.

Student learning is the primary focus of teaching. I would ask faculty to consider the following questions. How do you promote student learning? What do you do to consider the learning needs of your students? What resources are available to assist students outside the classroom and how do you facilitate students taking advantage of the resources?

I would tell them that they need to provide a connection with their students. Relationships are crucial. This is why LAP is so effective. It creates a humanistic approach to educational pedagogy that is needed in order to be successful and in order to retain the student with successful progression toward graduation.

In order to fill any possible gaps in the instrument, item 19 asked for any other general comments:

The field of learning assistance has so much to offer the greater community in higher education and is just beginning to be more highly valued by administration as true partners in learning. LAP professionals must learn to be more political in their own institutions as well as nationally. One area we should address directly is the splintering of our national organization into 5 or 6 organizations. It weakens our national voice and interferes with the development of knowledge in our field.

Every faculty member should be taught basic learning strategies so that they can share these with their students.

I'd emphasize the community of practice of LAP professional and para-professionals; one's experience in this field is contributed to by many.

Summary and General Conclusion

This study began with the premise that the role of an LAP professional develops the very same skills necessary for teaching, which may make LAP professionals beneficial to their faculty peers who may come to the profession underprepared for teaching. However, they often perceive themselves as underappreciated by either their institutions and/or faculty colleagues for their pedagogical knowledge, teaching skills, and ability to interact in professionally meaningful ways with full-time, non-LAP faculty members. Both the results of the pilot and the subsequent study confirm underappreciation and underutilization in the sample populations.

Respondents' value of teaching over administration, lessons learned as a result of LAP experience, and perceptions of the preparedness of faculty, all taken together suggest that the LAP professionals may have more to offer their institutions beyond LAP administration and more traditional forms of teaching open to LAP professionals, and that their potential may be vastly underestimated and underappreciated. Nearly half of respondents rated the impact of their LAP experience as high as possible on a 7 point scale, and data further suggested that LAP professionals believe their role is more centered on teaching and working with students than administering the center itself, pointing to a rich body of experience. Indeed, the learning from this experience is widely recognized by LAP professionals; nearly all say that it has impacted what they consider their teaching.

The value of LAP professional work with regards to teaching stems not only from the literature and research necessary to administer LAPs, but from the day to day practices themselves. The qualitative responses likewise show that the experiences are all applied theory, and, notably, those applied theories fall in line with current trending best practices in higher education such as active learning, universal design, and student-centered classrooms. Although this study did not directly address the utilization of LAP professionals on their respective campuses, the data suggests that LAP professionals feel they could be helpful on their campuses (item 10). Further research is necessary to determine the degree to which

universities are utilizing LAP professionals to advance teaching on their campuses, but given the administrative/faculty divide on most campuses and the workload common to LAP professionals, the researchers anticipate such studies will find that LAP are, in fact, underutilized in this regard.

As budgets tighten and workloads shift, this is hardly a call for more work to be placed on the desks of LAP professionals. But it is most certainly a call for much greater appreciation and opportunity. Teaching is often referred to as an art, and in this case LAP professionals are well-versed in theoretical and practical pedagogy and perceive themselves as improved teachers as a result, whether they have a traditional classroom or not. The underutilized and underappreciated skills of LAP professionals could be harnessed, perhaps, with additional money and staff. LAP professionals, given more resources, could certainly offer professional development, lead workshop series, and observe faculty in the classrooms. It must be noted, however, that the administrative/faculty divide is a wide bridge not crossed with funding alone. Although it was beyond the scope of this initial study, a further exploration of the socially constructed roles and understandings is called for.

This study also highlights a paucity of research into the significance of LAP professionals and their unique experiences as it relates to higher education pedagogy. While obtaining valid and reliable results with a relatively simple survey and limited sample size, this study needs to be completed on a larger scale, taking more factors into account such as campus utilization of LAP professionals, in order to increase generalizability. While research has generally focused with great energy on student outcomes, there has not been as much research strategic utilization of human and pedagogical capital. If nothing else, it is hoped that this study and further research will increase the appreciation that other faculty and administrators have for the contributions that LAP professionals can and often do make inside and outside of the classroom.

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Appendix
Learning Assistance Experience and Impact on Pedagogy (LAEIP)

Informed Consent
Many post-secondary learning support administrators (tutoring, mentoring, disability support, developmental courses, first-year advising, etc.) also have part-time or full-time teaching duties. This study attempts to examine the question of how experience with LAPs (learning assistance programs) impacts teaching philosophies and techniques of pedagogy when the same individual moves back and forth between administrating and teaching.

This research, when completed, will be shared with participants and with the larger academic community in the hopes of raising awareness and appreciation for the unique impact such experience has on instruction, and also in the hopes that LAP professionals will be given more appropriate opportunities to teach and to impact the pedagogy of their full-time faculty colleagues.

Completion of the survey is voluntary, and a respondent can close the window or quit the survey at any time and their answers will not be saved. The question items are designed to be anonymous, and demographic data is only gathered to see if trends within the sample are evident that might suggest further lines of inquiry.

The primary investigator is Associate Professor of Sociology Jack Trammell at Randolph-Macon College, who worked in a learning center for 16 years and now is a full-time teaching faculty member. The PI can be contacted at: jtrammel@rmc.edu

Your input in this research is important, and valued. Thank you for taking time to contribute to a better understanding of this phenomenon. The survey will take on average 10 to 12 minutes to complete.

Thank you.

1. **Gender Identity:** Female, Male, Other, Choose not to answer

2. **What is your age?**
   18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, 65 to 74, 75 or older, Choose not to answer

3. **What is your highest level of education?**
   4 year undergraduate, Master's or Equivalent, Part of Ph.D./ Ed.D. or equivalent, Ph.D./Ed.D. or Equivalent, Other (please specify)

4. **Type of Institution where currently or most recently employed**
   4 year public, 4 year private, 2 year public, Other

5. **Primary LAP area of most recent responsibility (you can check more than one)**
   Tutoring Program Mentoring Program Disability Support, Learning Center/Academic Center, Developmental Education, Reading or Writing, Other (please specify)

6. **Best characterization of teaching duties**
   Have none, Taught part-time previously Taught full-time previously Teach part-time, Teach full-time, Plan to teach in near future, Other (please specify)

7. **To what degree do you believe that working in a LAP setting has impacted your teaching practices (can be past, present or future teaching)**
   Not at all   Greatly impacted
   0   1   2   3   4   5   6

8. **Given the impact, in which way or ways would you say it has impacted you the most? (You can check more than one)**
   Understanding individual student learning needs, Embracing diversity of learners, Critiquing own instruction, Designing instruction differently, Designing assessment differently,

Working more with pacing, Other (please specify)

9. **To what extent would you describe your LAP experience as**
    All about mgmt. and training   All about teaching students
    0   1   2   3   4   5   6

10. **To what extent do you feel that your experience in LAPs (and potentially your teaching experience) could be valuable to full-time teaching colleagues?**
    Not at all   Might be greatly valuable
    0   1   2   3   4   5   6

11. **If you could choose to, would you**
    Teach more, Teach less, N/A, Other (please specify)

12. **Do you think typical faculty are trained enough in pedagogy, course design, and assessment?**
    Yes, Mostly, Not really, Not at all, Other (please specify)

13. **Can you give a brief example or anecdote that illustrates how your LAP experience has impacted your teaching? (type N/A to skip)**

14. **Are you a better teacher as a result of your LAP experience?**
    Yes, Probably, Not sure, Probably not, Other (please specify)

15. **Open-ended response: Can you remember a time when something happened in class and you recognized that it connected back to your LAP experience?**

16. **Rank the following in order from least impactful to most impactful when considering LAP experience impacting teaching**
    Seeing how much students can struggle, Understanding developmental aspects of student progress, Seeing students underachieve in spite of working hard, Understanding

systematic barriers for some students at the school, Seeing how characteristics of instructors impact different students

17. **For each of the following items, rate whether you are more or less likely to utilize it in the classroom as a result of your LAP experience**
Less Likely   More Likely
0   1   2   3   4   5   6
Active Learning
Service Learning
Flipped Classroom
Group Learning
Discussion

18. **If you could tell your full-time teaching colleagues something about your LAP experience, what would it be?**

19. **Are there any general comments you would like to share?**