

Academic Program Review Report

Learning Skills Center

California State University, Sacramento

Review Team

Dr. Sheri E. Hembree, Child Development

Dr. Gregory M. Kim-Ju, Psychology

Dr. Mary Jane Lee, Computer Science (Review Team Chair)

External Consultants

Dr. Glen McClish, Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies
San Diego State University

Dr. Sheryl O'Neill, Department of Mathematics
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo

Spring 2007

Overview

In the process of this review, the Program Review Team interviewed the following individuals:

Professor Roberta J. Ching, Director, Learning Skills Center
Professor Stan Barrick, Mathematics Coordinator, Learning Skills Center
Professor Susie McKee, Reading/Writing Coordinator, Learning Skills Center
Dr. Jeffrey Mason, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters
Dr. Roger Leezer, Chair, Department of Mathematics
Dr. Sheree Meyer, Chair, Department of English
Full-time Faculty: Pam Fredenburg, Tina Jordan, Ann Katz,
Elaine McCollum, Lesley McCurry, and Rebecca Mitchell.
Part-time faculty: Robert Crawford, Monica Page, Dan Orey, and Siddoc Ta
Students in LS 7B and LS 50, and students in the Learning Skills Math Lab.

The Program Review Team reviewed the following documents:

Learning Skills Center 2006 Self-Study
Learning Skills Center 2006-2007 Assessment Report
Learning Skills Center Program Review Team Report February 2000
Learning Skills Center 1998-99 Self-Study
External Consultants' Reports for Learning Skills Center Spring 2007
Professor Glen McClish, Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies, Chair
San Diego State University
Professor Sheryl O'Neill, Coordinator for Entry Level Mathematics and
Developmental Mathematics Program, Department of Mathematics
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo

The Review Team wishes to thank the Learning Skills Center faculty and staff for their cooperation in the preparation of this review report. The Review Team appreciates the willingness of the Learning Skills Center to respond to follow up questions and to provide additional information as requested.

Professor Glen McClish and Professor Sheryl O'Neill served as external consultants in the areas of writing and mathematics, respectively. Their reports were exceptionally positive and are quoted extensively in the review. These reports are provided as appendices in this review.

Summary of Commendations

Commendation 1: The Learning Skills Center is commended for its highly effective programs under the strong leadership of Prof. Roberta Ching, Chair, Prof. Stan Barrick, Math Coordinator, and Prof. Susie McKee, Reading and Writing Coordinator.

Commendation 2: The Learning Skills Center is commended for its cohesive organization of its lecturers, part-time instructors, graduate students, and tutors.

Commendation 3: Tenured faculty and lecturers are commended for their active participation on University and CSU system-wide committees. They play a significant and meaningful role in many units across campus, such as, EOP and Student Success.

Commendation 4: The Learning Skills Center faculty members are commended for their enthusiasm, passion, and commitment to help underprepared students succeed.

Commendation 5: The Learning Skills Center is commended for developing a curriculum that not only meets the needs of the University's developmental writing and math students, but also emphasizes high level critical thinking.

Commendation 6: The Learning Skills Center is commended for doing "a fine job of developing and delivering curriculum for multilingual students" (McClish, p. 2).

Commendation 7: The Learning Skills Center is commended for its contributions to the academic success of underprepared students at Sacramento State.

Commendation 8: The Learning Skills faculty are commended for being on the cutting edge of developing creative ways to "close the gap" between high school English and math courses and university level expectations of student performance in these subjects.

Commendation 9: The Learning Skills Center is commended for incorporating appropriate applications of technology into its instruction and laboratories.

Summary of Recommendations

To the Learning Skills Center:

Recommendation 1. The Program Review Team recommends that the Learning Skills Center continue to collaborate with the English Department and develop lines of communication with the Mathematics Department.

Recommendation 2. The Program Review Team recommends that the Learning Skills Center begin to develop an assessment plan by specifying and documenting clear student outcomes.

Recommendation 3. As part of their assessment plan, the Program Review Team recommends that the Learning Skills Center's mathematics program develop a procedure for tracking the progress of EO 665 students through their first required General Education mathematics courses.

To the College:

Recommendation 4. The Review Team recommends to the College that additional faculty offices and larger classrooms and student workspace be provided for the Learning Skills Center.

To the University:

Recommendation 5. The Review Team recommends that the University funding centers ensure that the Learning Skills Center has sufficient resources to effectively implement the provisions of EO 665.

Recommendation 6. The Review Team recommends that the Learning Skills Center be authorized an additional tenure-track position one year before the retirement of each of the three tenured faculty members to minimize interruptions resulting from personnel changes and to facilitate transition.

To the Faculty Senate:

The Review Team recommends approval of the Learning Skills Program for the next six years.

Introduction

The Learning Skills Center is housed in the College of Arts and Letters and receives funding from the University through the College. Learning Skills' Self-Study provided a detailed history of the evolution of the Center since its inception in 1975. The primary mission of Learning Skills is "to prepare students for their college coursework by offering courses for students who place below college level on the English Placement and Entry Level Mathematics tests" (Learning Skills Center Self-Study, page 6). In 1998, Executive Order (EO) 665, the mandate by CSU to reduce the need for remediation on CSU campuses, required students to (1) complete their placement tests before enrolling in any courses, (2) begin taking all necessary math and English preparatory classes in their first semester, and (3) complete all required preparatory classes before their second year. Students who failed to complete these requirements within one year were advised to finish them elsewhere unless there were extenuating circumstances. With more than half of the incoming freshmen students required to complete remediation within their first year here, EO 665 placed a significant demand on Learning Skills to prepare the large numbers of underprepared freshmen.

Learning Skills' Response to 2000 Program Review Recommendations

Since the last program review, Learning Skills "... has done an excellent job of responding to the challenges it has faced, building on its strengths while shoring up areas of weaknesses." (McClish, page 2) Of the 14 recommendations made by the 2000 Program Review Team, this Review Team believes that all but two recommendations have been addressed satisfactorily by Learning Skills. The two recommendations are discussed below.

1. *The Program Review Team recommends that the University funding centers insure that the Learning Skills Center has sufficient resource support to implement the provisions of EO 665.*

Recent increases in class sizes, with some classes increasing by more than 50%, have undermined the efforts and much of the progress achieved earlier. The resulting crowded classrooms and decreased one-to-one time between students and faculty are causes for concern. Given the program cuts which will likely occur with the current budget shortfalls at the State and CSU system levels, the University should take special care not to make further reductions to the Learning Skills program.

2. *The Program Review Team recommends that the Learning Skills mathematics program develop a methodology for following the progress of EO 665 students through their required General Education mathematics courses.*

The Learning Skills Center's response was "The mathematics coordinator regularly tracks student success in Math 1. Students who have completed LS 10A tend to outperform students who place directly into the course; students who have completed LS 7A/B tend to perform just under the level of those placing into the course (see Learning Skills Assessment Plan for annual data.)" (Learning Skills Center Self-Study, page 24) It would be informative to track students beyond Math 1, especially

those students who are required by their majors to take additional mathematics courses, to determine on a longitudinal basis how successful students are in their math courses.

The Learning Skills Center's Program Goals

The Learning Skills Center lists ten program goals in its Self-Study. A subset of these goals is discussed below.

- (1) *“Superior accomplishments in teaching and learning.”*
This goal is achieved through development of innovative curricula in English and mathematics, and the recruitment and professional development of faculty who are committed to teaching underprepared students and are sensitive to students' needs. Emphasis is placed on tutoring and providing other support to assist students in courses. Learning Skills has been successful in this area.
- (2) *“Enhancement of teaching as a dimension of professional development.”*
While teaching is weighted as 60% of the evaluation criteria, faculty are encouraged to participate in scholarly activities and faculty development/activities which include service to the University, articulation and outreach activities to high schools, community colleges, and other universities.
- (3) *“Use of advanced technological tools for teaching and learning.”*
Computers are being used effectively as an instructional tool to facilitate learning in math and English classes. Students enrolling in LS 10A: Elementary Algebra and Geometry have the option of taking the computer section which uses the ALEKS program, a multi-media version of LS 10A, or the traditional lecture approach. In writing courses, students create and edit essays using a word processor in the computer writing lab.
- (4) *“Academic programs characterized by high quality, serious attention to outcomes, recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge, commitment to life-long learning and preparing an educated citizenry, and responsiveness to regional needs.”*
Learning Skills excels in providing preparatory courses which serve as “... the foundation on which this University goal rests.” (Learning Skills Self-Study, page 12) The Self-Study further notes that “Learning Skills courses have carefully structured assessment of outcomes.” For further discussion of assessment, please see the Assessment section of this report on page 11.
- (5) *“Expand University support systems to improve retention and graduation rates of underrepresented students.”*
This is a fundamental objective of the University which Learning Skills successfully fulfills by advising, tutoring, and providing courses in mathematics and writing for underprepared and multilingual students.

- (6) *“Establish partnerships and programs of mutual benefit to the University and the Sacramento region.”*

Learning Skills Center Chair, Prof. Ching, and faculty have played key leadership roles in the development of programs systemwide to satisfy the EO 665 mandate. Prof. Ching serves on the English Placement Test (EPT) Development Committee creating items for the EPT and the EAP tests and advising the Chancellor’s Office about policies related to EO 665. She also serves on the CSU 12th Grade Task Force of CSU English faculty, high school teachers, and administrators who developed a statewide 12th Grade Expository Reading and Writing Course. The math coordinator, Prof. Stan Barrick, was invited by the Chancellor’s Office to assist in the development of MathSuccess website to help students prepare for college math.

- (7) *“Writing new courses and continual improvement of existing courses based on program evaluations, measures of student learning and course evaluations.”*

Learning Skills has been responsive to requests from the campus community to develop courses which are designed to reduce the failure rate of particular majors. In addition, they have experimented with a couple of courses, e.g., a 1-unit geometry adjunct course to Math 9 and a self-directed alternative to LS 10A.

Faculty

The Learning Skills Center is administered by Prof. Roberta Ching, Chair, Prof. Stan Barrick, Mathematics Coordinator, and Prof. Sue McKee, Reading and Writing Coordinator. There are 7 full-time faculty, 25 part-time faculty, and 6 teaching associates who teach the Learning Skills courses, serve as course coordinators, and are active on a number of program and University committees. In addition, there are 7 graduate assistants, 10 instructional student assistants, and 7 adjunct facilitators who provide instructional support for Learning Skills.

Commendation 1: The Learning Skills Center is commended for its highly effective programs under the strong leadership of Prof. Roberta Ching, Chair, Prof. Stan Barrick, Math Coordinator, and Prof. Susie McKee, Reading and Writing Coordinator. “The Learning Skills Center is an exceptionally high functioning, cohesive, academically sound unit, conscientiously and meticulously led” by its tenured faculty (McClish, page 2).

Faculty meet often to discuss course changes and to coordinate activities. Course content and syllabi are standardized to ensure quality and consistency across course sections. In our meetings with the program coordinators and faculty, it is apparent that they are a very dedicated group actively engaged in the development of the curriculum and committed to the success of their students. They have an enthusiastic and positive attitude toward their students and believe that engagement with students in the form of advising, mentoring, and counseling is an important part of student academic success. Many faculty, full-time and part-time, participate in course development and serve on Learning Skills committees as well as on University committees.

Commendation 2: The Learning Skills Center is commended for its cohesive organization of its lecturers, graduate students, instructors, and tutors.

The three tenured faculty members will likely retire within the next 5 years if not earlier. "It is imperative that the strong leadership in Learning Skills be maintained." (O'Neill, page 4). It is recommended that additional tenured track position(s) be authorized and replacement(s) hired in a timely manner to permit cross training with each of the three tenured positions. Both external consultants stressed the need to provide funding at the highest possible level. O'Neill recommends "to reduce class sizes back to 2002-03 levels as soon as possible" (page 5).

Recommendation: The Review Team recommends that the University authorize Learning Skills an additional tenure-track position one year before the retirement of each of the three tenured faculty members to minimize interruptions resulting from personnel changes and to facilitate transition.

Lecturers "enthusiastically and ably provide course coordination, curriculum development and assessment, and program direction" (McClish, page 2). They coordinate the EDT (English Diagnostic Exam) and collaborate with programs throughout campus, such as, CAMP (College Assistance Migrant Program). Such support reflects the commitment and involvement of this dedicated group in working to meet EO 665 requirements. The Learning Skills Center also plays a significant and meaningful role in such units as EOP, Educational Equity and Student Success, and the Student Athletic Resource Center.

Commendation 3: Tenured faculty and lecturers are commended for their active participation on University and CSU system-wide committees. They play a significant and meaningful role in many units across campus, such as, EOP and Student Success.

Tenured faculty and lecturers are engaged in GE/Graduation Requirements Committee, Writing Programs Committee, Faculty Senate, program reviews, EOP Summer Bridge, etc. Recently, faculty members served as advisors in the Academic Advising Center providing GE advising as well as serving as a resource for information on EO 665 and preparatory English and math requirements. Tenured faculty members are also active in state and regional educational organizations and initiatives, such as, California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other languages (CATESOL), CSU Task Force on Expository Reading and Writing, EPT Development Committee, and CSU English Council.

All faculty are involved in student advising. They strongly believe that, in addition to classroom instruction, strong student support is key to the success of unprepared students. Despite long hours grading papers and working with students, Learning Skills faculty believe that their work is crucial for student success and appear to have a high level of job satisfaction. The Review Team was impressed with faculty commitment and passion to helping underprepared students succeed. The Review Team was particularly

impressed with the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to the Center's goals demonstrated by full-time and part-time faculty.

Commendation 4: The Learning Skills Center faculty members are commended for their enthusiasm, passion, and commitment to help underprepared students succeed.

The Learning Skills Center provides an important training ground and professional development opportunity for graduate students, particularly M.A. candidates in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL). Supervising labs, tutoring, and serving as graduate teaching assistants, these graduate students apply the skills introduced in their course work while preparing for teaching positions in community colleges and universities. One student interviewed spoke positively about the value of her experience as a TA for Learning Skills and how that experience guided her in her decision to become a teacher.

Curriculum

The focus of the curricula in both math and English is the development of critical thinking skills. Because there is some urgency to bringing students up to college level proficiency, the curriculum is accelerated. "In the writing program, the emphasis is on critical literacy, the critical reading and analysis of a variety of texts, and the construction of argumentative essays in response to those readings. Students in all courses write whole essays which are then revised and edited in response to feedback from teachers, tutors, and peers. In the math program, the focus is on developing problem solving skills that can be applied to multiple step problems. In both programs, students are taught to logically analyze problems and arrive at a solution or a position. Unlike many developmental programs where the emphasis is on discrete skills, the preparatory courses in Learning Skills focus on higher level thinking" (Learning Skills Center Self-Study, page 5). McClish agrees and states that "their pedagogy emphasizes not merely mechanics and technical 'correctness', but broader principles of critical thinking and rhetoric essential to liberal education." (McClish, page 2)

Commendation 5: The Learning Skills Center is commended for developing a curriculum that not only meets the needs of the University's developmental writing and math students, but also emphasizes high level critical thinking.

Learning Skills has developed a track for underprepared students who are multilingual. Multilingual students take the same EPT test as native speakers. Based on the results of an evaluation of their EPT essays, multilingual students are placed in equivalent classes designed for multilingual students. Learning Skills also offers WPE preparation tutorials, and in collaboration with English, they offer workshops for multilingual students.

Commendation 6: The Learning Skills Center is commended for doing "a fine job of developing and delivering curriculum for multilingual students (McClish, page 2).