

Center for Teaching & Learning Task Force

Executive Summary of Conclusions & Recommendations

October 24, 2005

✚ Learning support services make a significant contribution to student recruitment, retention, and academic success. However, the current three-fold mission of the UIS Center for Teaching & Learning couples competing functions with diminished resources, and presents an obstacle to the effective delivery of learning support to students. Combining academic support for students, the promise of teaching-related professional support to faculty, technical support for writing and computer training for staff and faculty, and testing and evaluation functions – all in one increasingly understaffed center – presents an impossible administrative and service challenge. Moreover, the Center, as currently structured and staffed, cannot effectively meet the academic support needs of an expanded cohort of students. Therefore,...

- **Recommendation 1**

Re-orient the mission of the Center for Teaching & Learning at UIS to focus on providing the highest possible quality of academic support to students, and rename the Center to reflect this emphasis on fostering academic potential and facilitating students' achievement. Possible names are Academic Resource Center for Students, Academic Success Center, Student Achievement Center, Student Success Center, Learning Center, or Learning Resource Center.

- **Recommendation 2**

Transfer functions that are unrelated to, or that conflict with, the provision of academic support to students to other units. Specifically, the teaching component of professional development for faculty, all placement and make-up testing, and computer training for staff and faculty should be transferred to other units.

- **Recommendation 3**

Create an Office of Assessment and Evaluation, with staff to (a) coordinate program-specific placement testing in conjunction with core academic disciplines, such as English, Math, and perhaps even computer proficiency; (b) oversee make-up testing for on ground and online delivery; and (c) collect, analyze, and summarize data related to the assessment of learning outcomes for program, college, and campus-level use.

- **Recommendation 4**

Create a faculty-led, faculty-focused Center for Professional Development to deliver programs and services that promote and support ongoing excellence in teaching, scholarship, and professional service. An excellent prototype is the Faculty Center for Professional Development at California State University, Long Beach.


✚ To be maximally effective at UIS, a learning resource center must provide support for the development and use of fundamental academic skills at every level of the curriculum, although the scope of service will understandably decrease at the graduate level. Expanding the number of lower-division students and of online programs and courses will make it necessary to.....

- **Recommendation 5**

Significantly increase the availability of both on-ground and online learning support services in writing, mathematics, reading and study skills, and in challenging general education and major content areas of the curriculum.

- **Recommendation 6**

Allocate staff resources in ways that allow professional staff to be involved in service delivery at every level of the curriculum, including directly assisting graduate students with writing and data analysis.

 A learning resource center at UIS has the potential to strengthen recruitment for graduate programs, as well as the campus' reputation for excellence in teaching and applied learning. The center's ideal organizational structure and staffing plan will facilitate the student recruitment and educational goals of academic programs, but also be economically feasible.

- **Recommendation 7**

Balance high quality service to students with needs for cost-containment by developing a service delivery structure that includes professional personnel, graduate teaching assistants, and select undergraduate peer tutors and content coaches.

- **Recommendation 8**

Capitalize on the scope of the UIS curriculum and on faculty resources for excellence in teaching by developing a formal pre-professional program on teaching for undergraduate tutors and graduate teaching assistants. Such a program, delivered by the Center's professional staff, would include seminars and professional supervision differentially designed to address the respective roles of undergraduate peer tutors and graduate level teaching assistants.

- **Recommendation 9**

Make maximum use of personnel and resources.....

(a) by establishing and maintaining close working relationships with faculty in key academic programs, such as English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Accounting, and Economics, so that services are effectively linked to course-specific areas of need; and

(b) by providing an array of services, including assisting with developmental or college-preparatory courses; offering paired learning modules; facilitating supplemental instruction for the most challenging general education courses; expanding the availability of scheduled, open-attendance, peer coach-facilitated study groups; and delivering individual assistance as needed.

- **Recommendation 10**

Continue to provide high quality self-help materials for student use, and to deliver ESL assistance.

✚ To be maximally effective, a learning resource center at UIS must be perceived as welcoming, student-friendly, and service-oriented. It must also be perceived as delivering high quality services that support the academic mission at every level of the curriculum.

- **Recommendation 11**

Allocate resources...

(a) to expand the center's hours of operation;

(b) to expand the center's ability to provide all forms of academic assistance online; and

(c) to increase opportunities for staff development in areas of professional responsibility.

- **Recommendation 12**

Enhance the center's image as a resource for all students by hosting supported study periods at mid-term and during the last two weeks of the semester.

- **Recommendation 13**

Establish an advisory board and process that includes faculty, staff, and student representatives.

- **Recommendation 14**

Develop formal procedures for regularly soliciting and using student and faculty feedback about the center's services.

✚ Current levels of staffing and existing equipment are insufficient to adequately meet student needs for learning support at this time. Expanding the number of lower-division students, and of online programs and courses, will make it necessary to.....

- **Recommendation 15**

Allocate additional staff and equipment to the Center to strengthen the amount and range of learning support services provided to students. In addition to new computer upgrades, equipment, and software, the proposed staffing and service delivery model will require the following increases in staffing hours/positions:

(a) 0.67 FTE increase to support a full-time center director;

(b) 0.67 FTE increase to support a second writing specialist;

(c) 1.00 FTE increase for a full-time reading/study skills specialist;

(d) 1.00 FTE increase for a full-time math specialist;

(e) 1.50 FTE reduction in graduate-level assistantships;

(f) undergraduate peer tutors/content coaches to deliver 260 hours of small group and as-needed tutoring per semester; and

(g) work study students to provide an additional 20 hours per week of receptionist and clerical support for expanded hours of center service to students.

✚ As a campus-wide resource, the learning center's funding, perceived accessibility by students, functional relationships with other academic units, and effectiveness are matters of campus-wide interest. Moreover, although the nature of an effective learning resource center is such that it must create an atmosphere that is welcoming and student-friendly, and deliver its services through procedures that fully promote that orientation, the fundamental purpose of the center is to deliver an effective level and quality of academic support services. Therefore,...

- **Recommendation 16**

With regard to organizational placement, locate the learning center within the Division of Academic Affairs, but outside any one college. To the extent that long-range plans include the creation of a Faculty Center for Professional Development and an Office of Testing and Assessment, all three units could become part of a single reporting line to the Provost. Collectively, the three units facilitate academic effectiveness.

- **Recommendation 17**

As previously noted, ensure key academic program input and ongoing collegial relationships by installing an advisory board for the learning center that includes program and college representatives, as well as a liaison from the Division of Student Affairs.