

## QUESTION #11: WHAT KINDS OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES DO LAC'S OFFER?

*A conversation with Martha Maxwell*

Comprehensive college learning assistance centers provide a variety of academic support services to students, faculty and staff. Larger institutions may have separate departments for each of these programs while smaller colleges may include most or even all of them under a learning assistance center umbrella. In estab-

lishing a learning center, concentrate on a few key programs first, based on a campus needs assessment and expand to other programs as circumstances permit. To be most effective, LAC directors must coordinate their programs and work closely with academic departments and other campus services.

*Can you be more specific about learning assistance center programs?*

Yes. Based on a review of the literature, here are some programs and services that many learning assistance centers offer.

◇ Testing services: the LAC may administer diagnostic and placement tests for individual students, assist faculty by administering course exams for LD or other disabled students who require special testing conditions, administer standardized tests,

and proctor course make-up tests. At some small colleges, the LAC may even perform broader testing functions.

◇ Learning improvement programs: the LAC may diagnose student learning difficulties and prescribe appropriate activities, offer study skills workshops and learning strategies courses, distribute study skills information, partner with orientation programs,

and train resident assistants to assist dorm students with their learning problems and concerns.

- ◇ Tutoring: the LAC sees tutoring as one of its more important components and may offer drop-in or scheduled tutoring individually and in small groups, on-line tutoring, tutor training, and tutor certification through programs like the CRLA Tutor Certification program.
- ◇ Supplemental Instruction: the LAC may administer an SI program in which it works with faculty of high risk courses to select, train, and supervise students who meet with groups of students from these courses to demonstrate and model successful learning strategies.
- ◇ Computer labs: the LAC may administer computer labs for instruction in basic skills

like reading, writing, math, study skills, and critical thinking.

- ◇ Developmental course offerings: the LAC may offer credit and non-credit courses in reading, writing, math, study strategies, and critical thinking.
- ◇ Faculty services: the LAC may provide outreach services to faculty by demonstrating successful study strategies specific to their courses, describing its programs and services in selected classes, collaborating with faculty on teaching and learning research projects, and serving as a repository for course support materials.
- ◇ Referral service: the LAC may refer students to other campus departments such as counseling, campus ministry, health services, disabled student services, financial aid, academic advising, and career services.

*That seems like a large list of programs and services that the LAC can offer. How do I decide what my LAC should offer?*

If you are starting a learning assistance center, it is vital that you determine what functions are already being offered on your campus and who offers them. For example, you may want to set up a tutoring program and work toward gaining accreditation from CRLA, but find that there is a well-established writing center in the English department. Or you may want to offer help for those who suffer from test anxiety or math anxiety, a service already being offered by the counseling center or health service. Rather than duplicate ser-

vices, work with other services through referrals and cooperative use of personnel, space, and materials.

Remember that specific functions will vary with each institution and the mission of the learning assistance center. In determining what services your center should offer, you need to know what existing services are available on your campus and figure how best they can be integrated with your learning services.

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Burns, M. E. (1986). Management strategies to assist students in improving learning skills. *Journal of Developmental Education*, (9) 3, 2-4.
- Godsey, E. (1992). *The functions of a learning center*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Southern Missouri University.
- Martin, D. C. (1980). Learning centers in professional schools. In K. V. Lauridsen (Ed.), *Examining the scope of learning centers. New directions for college learning assistance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 69-79.
- Maxwell, M. (1978). *Improving student learning skills*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Maxwell, M. (1997). *Improving student learning skills: A new edition*. Clearwater, FL: H&H Publishing Company.

*Martha Maxwell founded reading and study skills programs at American University, the University of Maryland, and the Student Learning Center at the University of California Berkeley. Throughout her professional life, Martha has been involved in the College Reading and Learning Association, notably providing conference presentations and workshops. As appreciation for her service to the profession, CRLA recognized Martha with the Silver Anniversary Award in 1992 and the Long and Outstanding Service Award in 1997. Since retiring from Berkeley 20 years ago, she has been active in professional associations and institutes, consulted, and written books and papers. Seven of her books have been published, the latest being "Improving Student Learning Skills, A New Edition", (1997) H&H Publishing Company.*