

QUESTION #15: HOW WILL THE LAC FIT INTO THE INSTITUTION'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE?

A conversation with Gwyn Enright

That was the key question asked in California in the late 1970's when learning assistance centers were proliferating. Ideally, the LAC would enjoy an administrative alliance that would allow interdisciplinary offerings and technological support. Ideally, the LAC would also have the administrative ties neces-

sary to offer credit for classes and training and to include faculty respected by other campus academicians on the LAC staff. In this fantasy, the LAC would also be situated administratively so it had its own funding and didn't have to compete with other departments yearly or have to plan from grant to grant.

So, you've described your fantasy. What was the reality?

Of course, the actuality of where the LAC lies in the organizational structure has much to do with the history of the institution and the existing political realities. Using California as an example, at California State University Northridge, the Learning Resource Center had two lines of reporting! The director reported to the dean of student services and the site reported to the dean of the university, who was essentially the vice president of academic

affairs. In addition, the LRC was responsible to the head of library services for the facility. At San Diego City College, the Independent Learning Center director reported to the head librarian. At California's El Camino College, the LAC reported to the dean of instruction. The LAC at California State University-Long Beach, once under student services moved to academic affairs.

You're talking solely about California. What does this mean for the other 49 states?

Sorry about that. Let me think in more general terms. The LAC can be placed under student services or counseling, thus usually insuring the involvement of learning skills counselors and professionals adept at addressing the affective domain. Also, the LAC then is not viewed as a competitor for academic departmental funding and is well placed to be a service agency for the whole campus. On the other hand, the LAC can be placed under aca-

demical affairs or instruction. Then the LAC often enjoys more credibility with the content area faculty and usually offers credit for classes and even for tutor or paraprofessional training. The LAC can be part of a separate University College which is an academic unit designed to enroll and support special populations, or the LAC can even be funded through student fees.

What is the most important organizational consideration?

Placing the LAC where it serves the largest cross section of the campus population. That's why I think one of the most important questions to ask in planning the LAC is, "Where can we serve the greatest population?" Even though there are so many models avail-

able, guidelines don't have to be complicated. In the middle of the flurry of opinions about where an LAC truly belongs administratively, a practitioner at a professional meeting asked Martha Maxwell about this. Martha replied, "Put it where the power is."

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Carpenter, K. (1985). A place for learning centers in the administrative structure of postsecondary institutions. *Forum for Reading*, 17, 1, 23-27.

Whyte, C. S. (1980). An integrated counseling and learning center. In K. V. Lauridsen (Ed.), *Examining the scope of learning centers. New directions for college learning assistance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 33-43.

Gwyn Enright served as CRLA President in 1987. She had been Editor of the Proceedings from 1978 to 1981 and has published articles on test support programs and on the national status and history of learning assistance in the WCRLA/CRLA Proceedings and the Journal of College Reading and Learning. She received the CRLA Long and Outstanding Service Award in 1996.