

Bepko Learning Center
Assessment Response
Assessment Team Visit: April 7-8, 2005

Overview

The Bepko Learning Center participated in a two year self-study as part of a program review, which culminated with a campus visit of a team of external and internal reviewers on April 7-8, 2005. During the self-study process, valuable data and reports were compiled, which gave the Center a chance to look closely at programs and services offered, and to determine areas of strength and areas of concern.

The assessment team was lead by Terry Doyle, Director of the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, Ferris State University. The remaining member of the team included: Judith Patton, Director of University Studies, Portland State University; Olgen Williams, Director of Christamore House, Indianapolis; John Kremer, Professor of Psychology at IUPUI; and Sarah Baker, Associate Professor of Radiologic Sciences at IUPUI.

Highlights

The study concluded that the Bepko Learning Center (BLC) has done an outstanding job, especially considering its limited resources. The Center is an excellent model of a student-staffed unit, where undergraduate student mentors are trained to play effective roles in assisting other students in their academic development. The teamwork and mutual support evident in the University College, where the BLC is housed, was highly commended by the review team for contributing to the overall success of the Center.

Following are the recommendations from the review team and BLC responses:

1. The Center needs to define very clearly what it will use as measures of success and those measures should not include improved graduation rates or improved retention rates.

***RESPONSE:** Clarifying the measures of success in terms of students learning is an ongoing process for the Learning Center. In direct collaboration with faculty and the Director of Assessment for University College, the Learning Center is concentrating on gains students achieve from the mentoring sessions in understanding main concepts, the relationship between concepts, and relevance of the material to real world issues.*

Since the review the BLC has developed four mentoring courses (U201, U202, U203, & U204). In part these courses were developed to better assess student learning. The courses were developed conjointly between BLC and UC faculty. Following development all courses were presented to the University College Faculty for approval and adoption. Learning objectives are identified in each syllabus, starting with the foundational knowledge objectives and progressing to more synthesis and critical thinking objectives. In terms of effective mentoring approaches (an important measure of a successful mentor), the Learning Center has developed a detailed rubric to identify behaviors based on specific criteria. This rubric is explained in the mentor training at the beginning of each semester so mentors are aware of the criteria that will be used as part of their evaluation. Using this rubric formative and summative evaluations are completed on all mentors

To date all courses except U 204 have been offered. Assessments of U201, U202, and U203 have been undertaken and appropriate course revisions have been made. Continued assessment of all courses is ongoing.

2. The Center's director should work to develop professional relationships with interested faculty in all departments that offer gateway courses as a way to find support for the use of academic support services.

***RESPONSE:** The expansion of the Structured Learning Assistance program has grown at a controlled pace. The Learning Center has created new partnerships with the department of Philosophy (PHIL P162: Logic) in the School of Liberal Arts and the department of Physical Education (HPER P391: Biomechanics & HPER P409: The Basics of Exercise Physiology) in the School of Physical Education and Tourism Management. As resources allow, additional partnerships will be pursued.*

Also, as a way of communicating the current relationships with faculty and fostering new ones, the Learning Center sends an email to school deans and associate deans detailing the courses currently supported by the Learning Center and the mentors assigned to those courses.

Additionally, the Learning Center and Chemistry department have secured funding for a full time coordinator position to act as a liaison with the School of Science to assist in the development of new mentoring initiatives, which are science related.

3. Until the physical space problem can be addressed, the BLC should focus on using its most effective support programs which clearly appear to be Structured Learning Assistance (SLA) and the model developed for chemistry, Peer Led Team Learning (PLTL).

RESPONSE: *The Director is working to develop creative solutions to the space issue. Also, renovation on the second floor of University College is nearing completion, which will provide three classrooms for additional mentoring activities. Switching to the SLA model has helped control some space issues by providing established enrollments in courses which use an SLA component. Scaling back the number of courses with an Supplemental Instruction (SI) component has also helped our space needs.*

4. The Center staff should track mentors' graduation rates, GPA's, awards and later successes as alumni and use this information as a recruitment tool for new mentors and as demonstration of the high quality of training and development that the Center offers students.

RESPONSE: *In cooperation with many of the other mentoring programs on campus (Orientation, Mathematic Assistance Center, Sociology, etc.), the Learning Center has developed a Alumni Mentor webpage. This site will serve as a way to keep alumni connected to former mentors and possibly use their success stories as a great marketing tool to recruit new mentors.*

The Director is working closely with the Director of Assessment to ensure appropriate information (GPAs, graduation rates, as well as other factors attributed to the success of mentors--i.e. campus awards, scholarships, internships, etc.) is tracked as part of the Center's ongoing commitment to program evaluation. Assessment outcomes are also incorporated into the UC assessment plan.

5. The Center should explore the possibility of using students from the teacher education programs at IUPUI as mentors.

RESPONSE: *The Assistant Dean has brought this recommendation to the members of the IUPUI Council of Teachers Education. Currently we are waiting for a response from the council. We have also sent the names of mentors to their major department. For example, we share the names of Biology mentors with the School of Science. These science majors would make excellent Biology teachers if they are interested and if they are encouraged by their faculty to pursue teaching as a career.*

6. Learning outcomes drive all other teaching decisions, what methods to choose, what activities to include and what evaluation tools to use. Developing these learning outcomes should form the basis for an overall philosophy or pedagogy of learning in the specific disciplines served by the BLC. Forming these outcomes and the objectives to implement them along with the evaluation of the mentors' teaching/learning strategies will significantly upgrade the overall assessment of the BLC.

RESPONSE: *Since a large portion of the mentoring sessions are moving to a SLA model, the learning outcomes are developed primarily by the faculty in the specific disciplines. Mentors will be working very closely with the instructor who in turn will help the mentors develop effective learning outcomes.*

Additionally, the new mentor courses that have been implemented (UCOL U201, U202, U203 and U204) establish mentor goals and objectives in a progressive manner starting with U201 and cumulating with U204. The UCOL U201 course has been tailored to specific disciplines (i.e. Psychology and Biology) for the instructor to help the mentors decide what collaborative learning techniques, group activities and evaluations to utilize for effective mentoring sessions.

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To date all courses except U204 have been offered. Assessment of U201, U202, and U203 has been undertaken and appropriate course revisions have been made. Continued assessment of all courses is ongoing.

7. The IUPUI administration should be asked to recognize the outstanding efforts of the mentors.

RESPONSE: A rewards and recognition committee has been established to assist with this recommendation for outstanding mentoring. As part of this committee's charge, the Learning Center recognizes two "Mentors of the Month" (24 a year) as a way of celebrating the outstanding accomplishments of those mentors. The committee creates a bulletin board to convey the mentors' works and sends out an email to all of the current mentors to recognize their efforts.

The Learning Center also sends out an email at the beginning of each semester to school deans and associate deans detailing courses supported by the Learning Center and mentors who have been assigned to those courses. This communication serves as an informational piece which helps the schools and departments appreciate the effort put forth by the mentors.

Another recent recognition effort, established by the IUPUI administration, is a communication sent out to all second semester freshmen soliciting names of individuals on campus who have made a difference to them in their first semester of college. A large number of those identified were student mentors. The University College Dean sent letters to the student mentors nominated by second semester freshmen to congratulate them on their efforts in assisting freshmen. Additionally, their names have been publicized on the display units in the University College building.

8. The BLC should carefully review the value and impact the SI program is having on the academic success of students.

RESPONSE: A careful review of BLC data indicated that only 3 courses supported by SI mentoring session were well attended, and therefore, having the desired impact on student success. All other SI sessions were discontinued in favor of increasing the number of SLA options.

9. The assessment surveys for both Supplemental Instruction (SI) and SLA were not designed to measure student learning, and this is the crucial issue.

RESPONSE: New surveys were designed for use with SLA and SI. These assessment surveys were designed to not only gain insight into mentor strengths and weaknesses, but also to help mentors grow in their development as facilitators of the learning process. Utilizing these surveys the BLC is able to measure student learning.

On an ongoing basis the Learning Center Director is working with the Director of Assessment to evaluate assessment activities and make appropriate improvements. The Learning Center will also work with future participating faculty to develop an assessment tool which will be useful as a means for evaluating student learning.

10. The BLC may want to work with the psychology department to develop new tools for interviewing and hiring mentors who have the kinds of skills and abilities needed to deliver academic support services. Tools that may address personality, leadership and desire to perform service could be helpful in finding the best mentors.

RESPONSE: The Learning Center Director has worked with Dr. Lisa Ehrmann from the psychology department to develop new tools for interviewing and hiring mentors. Additionally the Learning Center Director has collaborated with Andrea Engler, Director of UC Orientation, to improve and/or develop tools and activities that assist in the identification of best mentors. One item that has been added to assist in the assessment and selection of outstanding mentors is a group interview process. With a major part of the mentor position being teamwork and the ability to deal with change, the Learning Center has enlisted the student academic coordinators as facilitators for the group interview process. The mentor applicants are split into small groups (approximately four to a group) and are asked to build the tallest tower using the items given in a bag in front of them. They have time to make a game plan then start building. During these group exercises, distinct personality traits surface, leadership styles and conflict resolution ability are also displayed. The applicants assume they are being judged on the tower height and they want to be the best. Some will be great leaders and take charge, helping the others to contribute; some will be overly aggressive; and some will loaf and let the others do the work. Midway through, the applicants are

surprised and told that they must switch towers right in the middle and start building on someone else's tower. They are informed about the aspect of flexibility in mentoring. This is when their reaction to dealing with change can be ascertained, either with a remark or body language. In the meantime, the student academic coordinators take notes on what they are observing for each applicant's attitude and behavior under the circumstances.

11. The Center would benefit from a more developed marketing plan.

RESPONSE: Marketing the services provided to the IUPUI campus has moved to the top of the Learning Center goals. Many courses of action have been taken to ensure that students, faculty and staff are well informed of the resources available.

The Director has met each semester with the Academic Advising Unit to provide information to the advisors on the many courses that have an SLA or SI component attached. Time and locations are also relayed so that the advisor has all the necessary information available to help students make informed decisions.

Also, the Learning Center is working with the University College Development and Operations office to create a professional brochure to convey the Center's services to a wide variety of audiences. This information will be sent to all school deans at IUPUI and the brochure will be placed in the student and parent packets distributed at orientation. The brochure will be placed in 2007 orientation packets.

Additionally, the Center (2007) will provide magnetic bookmarks to student and parents at orientation which will provide detailed information on all of the academic support centers located on campus including operational hours. A list of free departmental tutoring options will also be included.

12. The team understands that there has been some difficulty with senior level mentors and there is discussion on limiting the "life span" of a mentor to sophomore and junior years. The team suggests that this not be a blanket requirement.

RESPONSE: The new courses implemented (UCOL U201, U202, U203 and U204) have been established to help limit the mentor to four semesters of scholarship eligibility. The UCOL U204 course is repeatable and allows outstanding mentors to continue their mentoring positions on the recommendation of the component directors.

13. Given the very limited professional personnel of the Center, it is strongly recommended that the Center focus its efforts on those support services that are having the greatest impact on students' academic success.

RESPONSE: Conversations have occurred with all departments that have previously been in partnership with the Learning Center in providing SI instruction. The Associate and Assistant Deans have meet with faculty and department chairs to ensure the partnerships continue with the understanding that the mentoring service will be changed to an SLA model. BIOL N212, N214, N217 and N261 connections with SI have been highly successful due primarily to the competitive nature of the major, and the BLC will maintain the current SI model with those courses.

The Coordinator for Science Specific Mentoring Initiatives position has been developed to work with the School of Science and the Bepko Learning Center. This coordinator has helped tremendously in developing successful partnerships with new science initiatives.

14. Although the team is very strongly in favor of ongoing training for mentors and planning meetings for mentors, the Center director needs to monitor the effectiveness of these sessions.

RESPONSE: Ongoing training for mentors can be very challenging. Finding a time when all mentors are available has been an issue in continuing their further development as a mentor. The Learning Center has addressed this by using the UCOL mentoring courses (U201, U202,...) as a means of improving the communication and ongoing training of mentors. The BLC mentor courses were developed utilizing a hybrid format with in class and discussion forums via Oncourse. Mentor course faculty are responsible for ongoing training of mentors and evaluation and assessment of various assignments. The Learning Center Director oversees the operation of all mentor courses and faculty.

15. Faculty and students should be brought into the discussion on how to better use and increase access to technology resources and should be part of the process in determining future technological directions.

RESPONSE: *Individual meetings, faculty focus groups and student focus groups have participated in the discussion of how to better use and increase access to technology resources. A result of these discussions was the discontinuation of Smarthinking (an online tutorial support system).*

Nathan Byrer, UC Technology Director, along with faculty, students, and the Learning Center Director determined technology resource needs in the UC classroom renovation project. These individuals will assist in defining future technological directions for University College.