

**Peer Review Team Report**  
**on**  
**The Learning Center**

**Theodore Younglove, Chair**  
**Melanie Parker**  
**Rodney Schilling**  
**Susan Snyder**

**Summer 2008**

# Peer Review Team Report on:

## -The Learning Center-

After reviewing the Learning Center program review document, the peer review team interviewed Learning Center employees including faculty, staff, and the interim dean. All participated in the self-study process to varying degrees and are familiar with the report. Interviewees were uniformly supportive of the self-study and described it as accurately portraying the strengths and needs of the AVC Learning Center. The review went through five or six revisions until participants were all happy with the final product.

The level of dedication exhibited by Learning Center employees from top to bottom deserves special recognition. The commitment to the campus and the community, including individuals that society in general tends to marginalize, is impressive and is a key to making the Learning Center such a valuable resource for Antelope Valley College.

- All employees spoke very positively and supportively of Learning Center programs and staff.
- The Learning Center at Antelope Valley College has been contacted by numerous California Community Colleges who wish to use it as a model for developing their own learning resource centers.
- All staff appeared to be highly committed to the mission and purposes of the Learning Center and described it as a very positive place to work.
- One interviewee described the staff and faculty as “family”.
- Another employee mentioned that her greatest concern was the Learning Center’s ability to uphold high standards, while expanding to meet increasing student needs on both the Lancaster and Palmdale campuses.

## CURRICULUM

### Findings:

The Learning Center offers transfer level tutor training and supports AVC general education, transfer, and vocational goals with courses, workshops, and other forms of instructional support. The Learning Center offers students a wide variety of individual/group instructional activities as well as academic classes with well-trained staff. The curriculum is extensive for the students: ranging from writing, reading, math, tutoring, and ESL. Hence the subjects available at the Learning Center touch on most if not all of the disciplines of the campus. One interviewee said she believes the Learning Center helps students “Imagine the Possibilities” by providing them with tools for success: thinking and study skills, the ability to acquire knowledge for themselves, and the confidence to complete courses and move ahead with their goals. “If students can manage college, they can manage almost anything else.” The Learning Center, according to the report and the interviews, has done an exceptional and innovative job in support of AVC students.

The academic classes are classified in three ways: Transfer Tutor Training, Credit Instructional Support and Non-credit Instructional Support. Each of these areas faces the constant challenge of maintaining and updating in order to meet the needs of the ever-growing body of students and the AVC campus as a whole. The overall feedback from students and faculty has been very positive and the peer team concurs with the Learning Center Program Review survey results findings that the services provided by the Learning Center make a huge positive impact on the Antelope Valley College community. Two areas for possible expansion were identified: 1) on-line tutoring and 2) evening classes (LAC 200 for example)..

Recommendations:

1. Develop and carry out a systematic plan for the promotion of LAC 900 and 901 and their benefits at both the Lancaster and Palmdale Learning Center sites.
2. Continue to discuss additional online and hybrid classes/activities at both the state and local level.
3. Develop stronger methods for faculty referrals of students.
4. Continue ongoing evaluations of student needs.
5. Offer classes for the students' convenience and accommodations.

## **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

### Findings:

The Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are in the assessment and corrective action phase of the SLO process. The SLOs are directly related to ILOs 2 and 4 and the mission of the college as outlined in the 2007 Educational Master Plan. SLOs have been identified for all existing Learning Center Assistance (LAC) courses and are used to aid in the assessment of course and program effectiveness. Each semester these SLOs are used to determine the effectiveness of the courses and the student evaluations play a pivotal role in this assessment. Currently there are no approved SLOs that measure non-tutoring activities, but staff and faculty hope to begin development and testing of SLOs during the 2008-2009 school year. The Learning Center collects several forms of data to show improvement and evaluate the student's success: meta-cognition and field studies, student surveys, and evaluations.

The AVC Learning Center is also being featured in the state model of the Basic Skills Initiative handbook for innovative and exceptional Learning Centers. There is a rubric used to evaluate the Learning Center.

### Recommendations:

1. Continue to measure and revise SLOs.
2. Develop SLOs within the Academic Skills Center and for the courses currently in development.
3. Continue working with Institutional Research on evaluation and student success studies.

## PERSONNEL AND SUPPORT SERVICES

### Findings:

There are currently three full-time faculty members, four tutoring specialists, a lab technician, clerical assistants, adjunct faculty, and several tutors employed in the Learning Center. All employees interviewed indicated that there is a shortage of staff to meet the growth in demand. In addition to increasing staff size, a consistent theme across interviewees was a desire for a permanent dean. Our findings suggest that there is an agreement from within the Learning Center that a permanent dean is needed who understands and is focused on the needs of the department with a consistent direction over time.

Other personnel needed are: a full-time ESL specialist, more adjunct instructors, more SI leaders, more tutors, an assistant for the writing learning specialist, and more time for the reading learning specialist. The following staffing needs were identified during the interviews:

- Too few tutors are available to meet current needs. Establishing a pool of tutors to better meet the diverse tutoring needs encountered would help tremendously. Currently tutors are recruited largely through faculty referrals and sometimes through referrals from other tutors. The idea of advertising for tutors via “podcasting” has recently been proposed.
- Establishing a Learning Center Coordinator position would be quite helpful, in the view of one employee. A coordinator would supervise both faculty and classified employees and bring greater focus and consistency to Learning Center services.
- A dean who understands the idea of learning assistance and would provide “continuity to what we do”, was identified by one interviewee as one of the Learning Center’s greatest needs. “We are like a foster child in a biological family and are desperately in need of our own team”.
- A fulltime basic skills clerk to work with Early Alert and similar programs would be beneficial.
- Fulltime faculty to work in the reading and ESL labs is another need expressed. There is not presently enough work to hire a fulltime faculty member for each of these areas, but if faculty meeting minimum qualifications for both areas could be hired, this faculty member could fill both roles.

The student workers, faculty and staff of the Learning Center are well qualified and all receive important training. They are also evaluated at least one time per semester in order to enhance their effectiveness. However, full time Learning Specialists have become overextended. New full time learning specialists and staff need to be hired.

Recommendations:

1. Reclassification of tutorial specialists.
2. Request funding for Reading Learning Specialist.
3. Continue training of staff, faculty, and peer tutors.
4. Hire a permanent dean.
5. Hire a full-time ESL specialist.
6. Hire more support staff.

## **FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT**

### Findings:

During the interviews and according to the document, lack of space is a great concern and represents the greatest challenge to the Learning Center. Concern was also expressed that administration did not understand their need to have space available on flexible schedules, and that they have to fight to keep the space they have from being used for other purposes. Needs for more office space where confidential conversations and counseling could take place, more table space for quiet study, and quiet spaces for tutoring, reading, and use by learning disabled students were mentioned by two of those interviewed. Two of the classrooms within the Learning Center are taken for Language Arts purposes. Due to the compromised space, the center has had difficulty growing. The Supplemental Instruction has suffered over the last five years because of decreased space. Therefore the hours attended declined by over six thousand. New hires have been added without adding the space to expand to a growth in staff. The diverse centers: ESL, Writing, Reading, Math, and Tutoring are adjacent and occasionally intertwined spaces. The ESL center staff were concerned that the ESL computers are not close to the ESL center. Other concerns are the inadequate and outdated computers and software as well as a need for a classroom set of ESL books and textbooks for the main course taught on campus, ESL028.

The Peer Review team concurs that the Learning Center suffers due to lack of space which is inhibiting their ability to expand classrooms, activities and workshops. The current demand exceeds the space. Despite these conditions, the campus has continued to grow and is expected to do so even more in the near future.

Current student computers and other equipment are also old and out of date.

### Recommendations:

#### Short-term:

- a. Seek to return previous Learning Center space back to the Learning Center.
- b. More computers, especially for use in reading, writing, and online research are needed.
- c. Updated computer printing capabilities and updated software were also mentioned as needs.
- d. One interviewee mentioned that WI-FI would give students access from their own laptops and was something that should be considered.

#### Long-term:

- a. The Learning Center needs more space overall. Seek space in a modular unit to house Learning Center services.
- b. Seek a dedicated space at the Palmdale campus for Learning Center Services, with a stand alone building when the new campus is constructed.
- c. Seek the hire of an evening part-time lab technician.

- d. Each section of the center--writing, reading, math, ESL, and tutoring--needs to have individual space to support the objectives of that particular center.
- e. Buy new computers and software programs to meet “Best Practices” in basic skills.
- f. Purchase updated textbooks.

## **FISCAL SUPPORT**

### Findings:

The Learning Center budget was described as unstable. “We never know what it is. Without knowing the budget available, it is difficult to plan for future needs.” Another employee described money as an issue almost as great as the “crunch” for space. Although the budget is vague, the Learning Center has received several grants. With the anticipated surge in student attendance in the future, the budgetary allowances give a bleak outlook. Qualified tutors are hard to retain due to outside demand for tutors and their ability to pay at higher rates.

Our findings indicated that there is a frustration within the department regarding the lack of knowledge as to what is available within the budget in order to manage and prioritize spending. Furthermore, the Learning Center must continually rely on district funding as a major part of its operational budget. A surge of attendance in the future will make it difficult to maintain high quality services if changes are not made.

### Recommendations:

1. Seek to have a systematic operational budget process.
2. Seek raises for tutors in order to compete with outside tutoring agencies.
3. Have the budget known to the staff.
4. Increase funding for additional staff, supplies, and space.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PROGRAM AWARENESS

### Findings:

Learning Center employees conduct outreach at local high schools and have been instrumental in training tutors and establishing tutoring programs in the community. Employees are also involved with ICAN, a program that helps recruit first generation college students. Concern was expressed that the Learning Center is still a “well kept secret” and that there is stigma to be overcome in seeking Learning Center assistance. Advertising via posters and podcasts was mentioned for the recruitment of students and tutors both on campus and in the community. Staff and faculty participate in meetings and conferences with ACTLA (Association for Tutoring and Learning Assistance), Southern California Writing Association, International Tutoring Association, and other professional organizations. Occasionally faculty and staff from colleges just beginning the process of establishing a Learning Center visit AVC’s Learning Center as part of their planning process. The educational links to the community are in the review. The campus has a writing center advisory committee, yet it is suggested to have a Learning Center advisory committee from the different disciplines from the campus.

The Learning Center agrees with the Office of Instructional Research that as students are connected with the Learning Center early in the semester, student persistence and potential for their success can more greatly be reached. With that in mind, strong working relationships with departments, especially nursing have already been developed. With that being said, there is a strong agreement within the Learning Center that awareness within the campus needs to be put in place to a greater degree than is currently being practiced to further the impact already being made. The Learning Center has many plans as to how a deepening of awareness could be implemented.

### Recommendations:

1. Carry out various awareness plans.
2. Develop and implement better referral methods for faculty.
3. Continue plans to further relationships campus wide, including Early Alert and English department.
4. To create a Learning Center advisory committee.

## COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL AND STATE REGULATIONS

### Findings:

The self study states “Learning Center faculty and staff continually strive to make instructional programs and services meet criteria established by CAS, Title 5 guidelines, and the recent Basic Skills Initiative.” (p. 71) Tutors are certified through CRLA once they have completed LAC 100 and 25 hours of supervised tutoring. The Learning Center cites the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS), the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), the Association of College and Tutoring and Learning Assistance (ACTLA), the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) as a basis for regulations. The Learning Center in addition follows the Educational Code per Title 5 Regulations for the California Community Colleges Supplemental Learning Assistance and Tutoring Regulations. According to Title 5, the students are not allowed to self refer to tutoring. The Learning Center is in compliance of these regulations. All students who are not referred by a counselor or an instructor are first sent to a learning specialist for evaluation. The learning specialist then refers the students to the appropriate place for their tutoring needs.

The Learning Center faculty and staff continually seek to meet the criteria established in Title 5, CAS and the Basic Skills Initiative. The Learning Center follows a rubric to help evaluate its performance. There is many standards put forth by CAS in which the Learning Center rating is excellent.

### Recommendations:

1. Explore distance education offerings for tutoring that comply with Title 5 guidelines for apportionment.
2. Per the interview process and the report, the plan of action would be to work with the ACTLA and the Systems Office to change Title 5 to allow students to self refer.
3. The faculty at AVC needs to refer more students to the Learning Center for tutoring and other assistance.
4. The faculty needs to be educated on the Title 5 regulations and therefore refer at risk or in need students.