

# Twelve Key Questions to Answer and One Critical Issue in Designing and Implementing a Collegiate Learning Center

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In order to plan and implement an academic support program in higher education, the answers to several important questions are needed. However, the first and most important step is the identification of these questions which need to be answered. This listing is intended as a guide to formulating the twelve key questions.

1. What are the motivating factors behind the decision to implement a learning center? Increased retention? Recruitment? Increased G.P.A.'s? Assistance for targeted groups only? Etc., etc., etc. Can I clearly define each factor to be addressed by the learning center?
2. What are the expectations (demands) of the administration? Can I identify the expectations of the supervising agency (dean, vice-president, president, director) as well as all other administrative offices which had input to the decision to implement?
3. How can I balance the conflicting expectations which will arise in the development of the program(s)? Can I respond to the expectations of different divisions within the institution (faculty, athletics, dean, etc.) without compromising the program's credibility with and for the students it will serve?
4. Where is the actual power? Financial power? Curricular within divisions, departments, colleges? Where are my friends? Which have power?
5. How will I (must I) assess actual need for academic support? Use research already completed? Campus research? Campus interviews with faculty? With administrators? With students?
6. How will the learning center respond to the various needs? Will I be limited to one or two services? What kind of service(s) will respond best to each need? How do I know? Do I have evidence from the literature, from research? Can I defend my decisions?
7. What will be the parameters of each of the learning center's services? Must I define any limits to the qualifications of student users? Will each service be available on an unlimited basis to all students? Some students? Limited basis? Why? [54]

8. How should the learning center be staffed? full-time personnel? Professional staff? Support staff? Faculty? Student staff? Only graduate assistants? Only work-study? Volunteers? Each service staffed separately? Or will all be involved in all services?

9. What are the qualifications expected (desired, needed) for each of the staffing positions I have identified? Degree? Experience? Skills? Can I defend my expectations?

10. Where will the learning center be located organizationally? Will the learning center be organizationally attached to student services, and if so, how will I network with the academic side? Or, will the program report to a college or a department? If so, is it important to build communication bridges to other colleges and/or departments? Where will the learning center be located physically? Will the facility be reconfigured to meet the needs of the services of the learning center or must the programs fit into “second-hand” space? How can the space be made to serve the program and the students using the programs?

11. How will evaluation/assessment be conducted? What role and what shape will program evaluation take? Are specific results expected (i.e., “3% increase in first year student retention each year”)? How will data be collected? Used? For whom? And, for what purpose?

12. How will the learning center be managed? What does the organizational chart look like? Are responsibilities and expectation clearly defined? Do I know (understand) my management style? Will all staff be involved in program development? Decisions? Planning? Assessment? If not, who will and who won't? How will staff be trained? What communication methods will be used between and among staff to keep all involved and committed?

### **One Critical Issue**

Develop an **identity for the learning center** and a **comprehensive public relations** plan. Determine the image that will project the learning center's identity — to the students, to the faculty and administration, to the public at large. Then devise a plan to bring about instant recognition of the image. Identify a logo (if the school allows) and use brochures (for different purposes), flyers, posters, bookmarks, calendars, letters to faculty, ads in the student newspaper, radio spots on the college station, pencil giveaways, popcorn at registration. Design a comprehensive calendar for public relations events and activities. [55]