

Title of Grant: Holding the Center: A Workshop for Learning Assistance Administrators

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Abstract:

This drive-in workshop provided VCCS learning support service coordinators with an opportunity to share approaches and to discuss challenges they confront in offering comprehensive support services. Coordinators hold a variety of employee ranks (administrative, faculty, staff) and are housed in various divisions, so there has never been a VCCS Peer Group or any other meeting to bring them together.

Stated Outcomes:

Goal 1 Outcome: A majority of VCCS learning support center coordinators will attend this event.

Goal 2 Outcome: Participants will brainstorm and share their perceptions of the major issues facing learning support centers.

Goal 3 Outcome: Participants will develop an action plan for improving coordination among learning support coordinators.

Goal 4 Outcome: Participants will develop an action plan for increasing professional development opportunities and sharing PD resources for learning support coordinators.

Goal 5 Outcome: Participants will develop an action plan for improving the quality of learning support services at VCCS colleges.

Other Colleges:

Personal invitations were made to twelve VCCS colleges [BRCC, CVCC, DCC, GCC, JSRCC, JTCC, NVCC, PHCC, PVCC, RCC, SCC, and TCC]. There was difficulty in locating those who worked in learning assistance at several institutions, as these positions are not often standard, are housed in different divisions or departments, and include both full and part-time faculty. Seventeen participants from seven VCCS colleges attended [CVCC, JSRCC, JTCC, PVCC, RCC, SSVCC, and TCC].

Discussion and Critique:

The workshop was a great success. Participants were enthused and eager to meet again. The biggest improvement would be to attract more schools, which our newly broadened list will enable us to do. The workshop would have been more heavily attended if held earlier in the spring semester in February instead of March, but conflicts with two other workshops made this difficult. Discussions of tutor training as well as the length of the workshop could be extended. Perhaps the balance of the budget [we

were able to get some of the conference supplies for free] could have been used to bring in a speaker. Overall, the workshop was a success and people were very grateful for the opportunity to have met.

Evaluation:

At registration, participants were asked to rank issues of importance to them in learning assistance administration and add additional potential discussion topics. These rankings helped structure the workshop around participants' concerns. During the workshop, a worksheet was given to further focus the group's work as a whole and to plan for future meetings. At the end of the workshop, participants completed an evaluation. They were asked on a scale of 1 [No value] to 5 [Extremely valuable], "Please rate the value of the workshop to your professional development." Thirteen evaluations were returned. Eight participants selected 4 [Very Valuable] and 5 participants selected 5 [Extremely valuable]. Participants found the following most valuable: collaboration with colleagues, "a better understanding of how many of the VCCS Learning Center/areas work," "the process of tutor training and learning about the structures [i.e. facilities, pay rates, reporting]," and "potential ways to improve offerings." Participants said the workshop could be improved by: "having more time," "more schools represented," and "even more take away tools." Several respondents felt the workshop was "excellent."

Participants also looked forward to an opportunity to meet again: "Have a follow-up workshop," with "more specific training now that we know what we need as a group." To that end, participants divvied up the unrepresented schools and agreed to contact learning assistance coordinators at those schools. Those names have since been added to our list of contacts and to the group's new Blackboard site. There was a sense of group solidarity and a desire to collaborate with one another to improve and professionalize services. [.pdf files of these evaluations can be sent to the system office if desired].

VCCS Benefits:

This mini-grant provided the first opportunity for many learning assistance coordinators to meet their peers. VCCS colleges are seeing a rise in unprepared students, so learning assistance centers are seeing an increasing demand for their services. However, services are not uniformly administered, with some colleges offering well-developed centers with stable, trained staffs and others cobbling together support that is irregular and poorly funded. It is important that learning assistance assists, or facilitates, student learning. However, poor learning assistance can create an unhealthy relationship in which the student becomes dependent on the tutor. Therefore, the importance of training tutors to assist students and facilitate increasing independence was a central focus, and the benefits of affiliation with national tutor certifications also included. Budgeting, learning support structure, service to distance learning and dual enrollment students, and assessment and evaluation were also discussed. The workshop provided opportunities for each of the centers to further professionalize their offerings and to take back to their institutions policies and procedures in place at peer institutions. A Blackboard site was also created to knit together learning assistance coordinators at all schools [participants agreed to locate learning assistance administrators at non-participating schools and add them to our Blackboard site]. This Blackboard site will make it easier to share resources and communicate about best practices.

Improving communication and sharing ideas and resources will raise awareness among VCCS learning support coordinators about best practices in the VCCS. Ultimately, students will benefit from the increased coordination among service providers, the increase in opportunities for service provider professional development, and the improvement in quality of service that results from the sharing of ideas, resources, and strategies.