

# The Instructional Program Review Narrative Report

**1. College:** Merritt College

**Discipline:** Department or Program: Learning Center/ Learning Resources

**Date:** October 29, 2012

**Members of the Instructional Program Review Team:**

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## **2. Narrative Description of the Discipline, Department or Program:**

Please provide a general statement of primary goals and objectives of the discipline, department, or program. Include any unique characteristics, degrees and certificates the program or department currently offers, concerns or trends affecting the discipline, department or program, and any significant changes or needs anticipated in the next three years.

### a. General Statement of Primary goals and objectives of the Learning Center

The mission of the Merritt College Learning Center is to serve as a campus hub for learners and to assist students in becoming more efficient, effective, and independent learners. The primary focus is to provide supplemental academic support and to help students reinforce the mastery of concepts in college courses across the curriculum.

### b. Unique characteristics, degrees and certificates the program or department currently offers, concerns or trends affecting the discipline, department or program, and any significant changes or needs anticipated in the next three years.

To assist students in achieving their maximum potential, the Learning Center staff collaborates with faculty, staff, and administrators in addressing the learning needs, academic performance, and retention of students. Supplemental academic support services include:

- Free drop-in tutoring and mentoring
- Open entry/open exit supplemental instructional courses in Learning Resources and English
- Writing Across the Curriculum (WRAC) services to help students understand the writing process
- Mathematics lab academic and supplemental services to support developmental, vocational, collegiate, and transfer level courses

- General tutoring in biology, chemistry, physics, CIS, and other disciplines (as budget allows)
- Open computer labs and computer aided instruction
- Study skills and success workshops and classroom presentations, often in partnership with Counseling and College Success faculty
- Study skills strategies provided in the form of tip sheets, and online resources
- Study groups led by faculty and tutors
- Training in discipline specific content strategies, learning theory, study strategies, communication strategies, learning styles, diversity, and customer service

As a result of the services provided by the Learning Center students will be able to increase skill levels in one or more of the following areas:

- To become more independent learners
- To increase self-confidence
- To decrease stress level
- To improve in-class performance
- To improve grades
- To become more aware of how they learn best
- To increase knowledge of the subject
- To complete homework assignments
- To achieve learning potential
- To better define and solve problems
- To become more comfortable in using technology
- To use collaborative learning to achieve course objectives
- To prepare for their goal (transfer to another college/university, complete vocational and technical programs, and to obtain employment, etc.)

The most significant change expected for the Learning Center within the next three years (2012 to 2015) will be a move to newly renovated facilities. Prior to 1995, Merritt's Tutorial Services was located in Building Q, and the Writing Center and Computer Lab for students were located in separate areas of the lower level of Building L. In 1995, Tutorial Services, the Writing Center, and the Computer Lab merged and moved to its current location in Building D to form what is now the college's Learning Center. This merger provided centralized delivery of academic support services to students and significantly.

The Learning Center and Library Facilities Renovation Planning Team was established in July 2008 to facilitate planning for the renovation of the L Building which would include the renovation of the Library on the second and third floors and a newly renovated Learning Center which will be located on the first floor L Building. Since 2008, the planning team has been comprised of Learning Center faculty, college librarians, Learning Center and library classified staff, college administrators, District facilities

project managers, and architectural firm representatives. Four Merritt Presidents have led the College since the project began.

Currently, the construction phase of the project was completed in spring 2012. A punch list of remaining items that needed to be completed was forwarded to the District's project manager. The FF&E phase of the project is currently in process. The FF&E order for the Learning Center and Library was prepared in July 2012 and approved by the Peralta Board of Trustees in fall 2012. The furniture for the renovated Building L has now been delivered and a walk-through is scheduled for the Learning Center and Library staff on November 1, 2012 to confirm accuracy of the order and the installation of all FF&E.

Disagreement exists in the timeline for occupancy of the newly renovated Building L. A new HVAC system was a part of the original plans for the renovation of Building L, but was removed from the project when a campus-wide chiller construction project was implemented instead. As a result, the timeline for completion of the campus chiller project does not align with the timeline for the completion of Building L. Faculty and staff have great concerns about occupying the newly renovated Building L and would like to seek an independent assessment of the viability of healthy airflow and ventilation upon the use and occupancy of the building by faculty, staff, and students. Meetings will be scheduled in November 2012 to discuss these issues and to confirm a move-in date.

Lastly, other significant changes anticipated in the next three years will be the need for increased staffing levels in order to provide adequate coverage in tutorial and computer lab services upon the move to Building L. The Learning Center faculty and staff will also need to plan on how the student sign-in system will function in the new facility so that we accurately capture student usage of tutorial and computer lab services. The Learning Center faculty and staff also need to address improvements in the SARS student sign-in system that was implemented in fall 2008. The SARS system as utilized in the current Learning System layout may not be capturing all student usage of tutorial services and use of the computer labs. In addition, students still are unable to print out on an on-demand-basis their Learning Center contact hours. More importantly, in reviewing the data from fall 2000 to the present one can easily identify a sharp decline in reported student usage data. Ultimately, this type of data inaccuracy could negatively impact decision-making related to services and staffing available to students in the Learning Center.

### **3. Curriculum:**

- Is the curriculum current and effective? Have course outlines been updated within the last three years? If not, what plans are in place to remedy this?

The course outlines for LRNRE 280 and LRNRE 501 were updated in February and March 2009, and included Student Learning Outcomes Addendums.

The course outline and Student Learning Outcomes Addendum information for the English courses taught in the Learning Center are reflected in the Program Review for the English Department.

- Has your department conducted a curriculum review of course outlines? If not, what are the plans to remedy this?

A curriculum review of the LRNRE 280 (variable unit) and LRNRE 501 (zero units) course outlines was conducted in collaboration with Barbara Dimopoulos in spring 2009. There has been no need to update the open-entry/open exit course outline for LRNRE 280 or LRNRE 501 since its last curriculum review.

- What are the department's plans for curriculum improvement (i.e., courses to be developed, updated, enhanced, or deactivated)? Have prerequisites, co-requisites, and advisories been validated? Is the date of validation on the course outline?

In the 2013 academic year, the LRNRE 280 course outline will undergo curriculum review to determine if a lecture component should be added to the lab component of this course.

In addition in preparation for expanded service opportunities in the new facility, Learning Center faculty for Study Skills, English, mathematics, and sciences will need to collaborate on curriculum offerings (e.g. the new Writing Across the Curriculum Center; and the new separate mathematics, and science learning spaces.

- What steps has the department taken to incorporate student learning outcomes in the curriculum? Are outcomes set for each course? If not, which courses do not have outcomes?

Student Learning Outcomes have been incorporated in the curriculum and were approved in presented to the Curriculum Committee in March 2009 for LRNRE 280 and LRNRE 501.

- Describe the efforts to develop outcomes at the program level. In which ways do these outcomes align with the institutional outcomes?

N/A

- Recommendations and priorities.
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#### **4. Instruction:**

- Describe effective and innovative strategies used by faculty to involve students in the learning process. How has new technology been used by the department to improve student learning?

Each semester, changes in the delivery of course content for the LRNRE 280 Study Skills course syllabi are made. The goal and challenge is to increase the active engagement of students enrolled in a self-paced, open-entry, open-exit course, for variable units. Diverse learning strategies are employed to create a safe learning environment and to increase the number of students meeting with the instructor on a weekly basis.

To date, a textbook has not been required for the LRNRE 280 course, but the instructor is considering changing that policy by requiring the purchase of a text or online Study Skills curriculum modules for to improve student participation and learning.

Overall, the Learning Center environment promotes an environment designed to meet a variety of student learning needs: one-on-one tutoring, individual and group study, faculty assistance in English, mathematics, ESL, and Study Skills, and computer lab technology to support students in research and completion of course assignments.

- How does the department maintain the integrity and consistency of academic standards within the discipline?

N/A

- Discuss the enrollment trends of your department. What is the student demand for specific courses? How do you know? What do you think are the salient trends affecting enrollments?

The following chart outlines Learning Center student contact hours, number of students using the services, number of tutors, and FTES generated. *Special Note:* There has been a noticeable decline in the accurate tracking of student contact hours and student usage of Learning Center services since SARS was implemented in 2008.

School Year	Learning Center Contact Hours	Learning Center Students Tutored	Learning Center Tutors	Learning Center FTES	% of Students Using Learning Center
Summer 2009	1,420	403	9	.78	Date To Be Added
Fall 2009	19,404	1,201	31	13.77	
Spring 2010	15,679	1,101	20	8.49	
<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>	<b><u>36,503</u></b>	<b><u>2,705</u></b>	<b><u>60</u></b>	<b><u>23.04</u></b>	
Summer 2010	1,297	234	7	0.22	
Fall 2010	13,511	1,097	20	6.39	
Spring 2011	22,520	970	18	41.30	
<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>	<b><u>37,328</u></b>	<b><u>2,301</u></b>	<b><u>45</u></b>	<b><u>47.91</u></b>	
Summer 2011	2,059	630	8	0.22	
Fall 2011	25,174	1,078	24	23.09	
Spring 2012	11,817	965	28	32.09	
<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>	<b><u>39,050</u></b>	<b><u>2,673</u></b>	<b><u>60</u></b>	<b><u>55.40</u></b>	

- Are courses scheduled in a manner that meets student needs and demand? How do you know?

The courses scheduled in the Learning Center are open-entry/open-exit, positive attendance courses. Therefore, students access Learning Center services based on their individual scheduling and convenience before classes, after class and on days when they are not scheduled to attend classes.

- Recommendations and priorities.
  1. Develop, plan and implement new student sign-in system for accurate data tracking of student usage of Learning Center services in the new Building L facility.
  2. Survey students and hold focus groups on Learning Center curriculum course offerings.

## 5. Student Success:

- Describe student retention and program completion (degrees, certificates, persistence rates) trends in the department. What initiatives can the department take to improve retention and completion rates?

The Learning Center provides supplemental/academic support outside of classroom instruction to support student success. Initiatives to improve retention/completion rates are in collaboration with academic instructional departments, counseling, and student services.

To improve the overall effectiveness of Learning Center services and student success include: 1) The Learning Center staff holds tutor training sessions, but needs to formalize a certified tutor training program and annual schedule for training; and, 2) consider providing on-line training support for tutors.

- What are the key needs of students that affect their learning? What services are needed for these students to improve their learning? Describe the department's efforts to access these services. What are your department's instructional support needs?

The Learning Center has participated in the implementation of Goal 2 of Merritt's Title III grant in targeting tutorial and supplemental academic support services with increasing the number of embedded tutors who work with specific faculty in Learning Communities and the First-Year Experience Program. The embedded tutors attend classes, collaborate with the instructional faculty/counselors, and hold hours in the Learning Center to individual tutoring of students.

- Describe the department's effort to assess student learning at the course level. Describe the efforts to assess student learning at the program level. In which ways has the department used student learning assessment results for improvement?

The Learning Center faculty and staff will establish a system to assess the impact of tutorial services on student success (e.g. Track successful course completion of students tutored in a subject versus those who did not receive tutorial services, etc.)

- Recommendations and priorities.
  1. Increase the Learning Center instructional Aides/student tutor Fund 01 budget allocation from 45,000 to \$57, 350 to cover increase in the number of tutors needed to support tutorial services across the curriculum in the new facilities.
  2. Develop a library of tutor professional development resources (e.g. approx. \$1,000).
  3. Integrate procedures for the Writing Across the Curriculum (WRAC) lab and the new Mathematics and Science Study areas into the Learning Center Facilities Renovation planning process.
  4. Establish system of tracking the success of students who use tutorial services.

5. To meet expanded service needs in the new facility, request a Fund 01 budget allocation of \$4,600 for resource materials (currently funded by the Title III).
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## **6. Human and Physical Resources (including equipment and facilities)**

- Describe your current level of staff, including full-time and part-time faculty, classified staff and other categories of employment.

The Learning Center is staffed by a .50 Learning Center Director (faculty), Learning Center Coordinator (full-time classified staff), and Computer Lab/Instructional Assistant (full-time classified staff). One English faculty member is assigned to the Learning Center English 280 course and maintains an office in the Center. Other English and mathematics faculty meet with students although they are not required to hold a specific number of hours for load in the Learning Center.

- Describe your current utilization of facilities and equipment.

All areas in the Learning Center are currently utilized including: an area for general tutoring; the Mathematics lab (which is the area reserved for quieter study); two computer labs which are used by students and for classroom instruction; limited storage areas; and, faculty/staff offices.

The computers in the two computer labs of the Learning Center are “old”, “outdated”, and are in need of immediate replacement. Some computers are 10 years old!!! The faculty and staff computer office equipment is “old” and “outdated”, as well.

A Go-Print System for students to purchase print cards for computer lab printing was installed in the Center in been upgraded. The Go-Print System for student printing and updated computer lab printers were purchased with Measure A funds and installed in 2009.

- Are the human and physical resources, including equipment and location, adequate for all the courses offered by your department (or program)? What are your key staffing and facilities needs for the next three years? Why?

Learning Center faculty and staff will need to recommend, prior to the College’s final budget development priorities for the 2013-14 academic year, the increased number of tutors and reception staff that will be required for expanded services and operations upon the move to Building L.

The Learning Center faculty and staff will need to collaborate with the Dean in identified additional faculty staffing hours for the new Writing Across the Curriculum Center, mathematics and sciences tutorial labs. These faculty would work with the discipline tutors and serve students, as well.

New computers went forth as a college priority in January 2012, but have not been ordered to date. In addition, the Learning Center Director will need to work with the District Facilities Project Director to identify the \$7,000 of equipment that was pulled from the FF&E order in summer 2012. That equipment will be needed for full functioning and performance of services in the new Learning Center in Building L.

Lastly, the budget for the Learning Center has fluctuated greatly during the past three years and needs to stabilize, particularly as the Title III grant nears its end. The Title III grant funds have been able to support additional tutors for the Learning Center and embedded tutors for basic skills, Learning Community, and FYE courses.

- Recommendations and priorities.
  1. To establish a realistic Fund 01 budget allocation for the Learning Center tutors/instructional aides (\$57,350.00).
  2. To establish a F01 budget allocation for the annual GoPrint Station maintenance contract (\$2,500).
  3. To establish as a priority a Fund 01 allocation for the required “institutionalization” of five (5) new additional tutor hires as required by the Title III grant (\$18,320).
  4. To purchase and install immediately new computers to replace the “old” and “obsolete” computers in the Learning Center computer labs, even if it is prior to the move to the new facilities in Building L.
  5. To allocate approximately \$5,000 to update software programs on the new computers for the two (2) computer labs to serve student computing needs and instruction held in the computer labs.
  6. Identify and plan for additional faculty staffing hours in the new Learning Center.
  7. Ensure follow-up with the District Facilities Project Manager for the new Learning Center to ensure that items on the construction punch list are completed in a timely manner and prior to the move into Building L.
  8. Work with District Facilities Project Manager to receive an independent assessment of the “healthy” occupancy of Building L prior to the completion of an HVAC system for the building.

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## 7. Community Outreach and Articulation

### *For vocational programs:*

- Describe the department’s connection with industry. Is there an Advisory Board or Advisory Committee for the program? If so, how often does it meet? Is the program adequately preparing students for careers in the field? How do you know?

N/A

- Have students completing the program attained a foundation of technical and career skills? How do you know? What are the completion rates in your program?

N/A

- What are the employment placement rates? Include a description of job titles and salaries. What is the relationship between completion rates and employment rates?

N/A

- What industry trends are most critical for the future viability of the program? How do you know? What are the implications of these trends for curriculum development and improvement?

N/A

***For transfer programs:***

- Describe the department's efforts in meeting with and collaborating with local 4-year institutions. Is the program adequately preparing students for upper division course work? How do you know?

N/A

***For all instructional programs:***

- Describe the department's effort to ensure that the curriculum responds to the needs of the constituencies that it serves.

The Learning Center faculty and staff continue to conduct classroom presentations and workshops to facilitate outreach and to promote the benefits of tutorial and computer lab services to students. During the 2012-13 academic year the Learning Center faculty and staff and will conduct a survey and student focus groups to identify suggested improvements for the delivery of services.

The Learning Center faculty and staff will also utilize data from the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, CCSSE, and Title III Annual Report of Student Outcomes Report results, findings, and data to assess the responsiveness of the Center in meeting student and faculty needs. Students also complete tutor evaluations following individual tutorial sessions. The Learning Center faculty and staff will institute a plan to evaluate all tutors annually.

- Recommendations and priorities.
  1. To increase outreach efforts to discipline faculty and student services departments so that they become effective referral agents for students.
  2. To participate in the college's planning process for the implementation of an effective early alert system.