

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Program Review**  
**Learning Center/Student Life**

**EXTERNAL REVIEWERS**

Garrison Dyer, Associate Dean, Academic Support Services and Associate Director for Learning Resources, Santa Clara University

Khuyen V. Nguyen, Executive Associate Director, Student Learning Center, University of California at Berkeley

**CAMPUS VISIT:**

April 22, 2024 to April 23, 2024

**Introduction**

Prior to the site visit the review team was provided with reference information related to the University of San Francisco **Learning Center** including:

- USF’s Vision, Mission, and Values, and strategic goals.
- USF facts and information
- A comprehensive self-study written by **the Learning Center** and supporting information and data related to services, programs, staff, and resources.

During their site visit, the reviewers met with a variety of community stakeholders (staff, faculty, administrators, and students) who collaborate with and are served by **the Learning Center**, in addition to community partners whose programs **the Learning Center** serves. The Assistant Dean also gave them a tour of campus spaces relevant to the programs and services of the Learning Center.

**Overall Quality of Program**

*“The committee rates the overall performance of the Learning Center as good. The Learning Center team is clearly a group of dedicated professionals committed to providing quality academic support resources to USF students. Their work is valued by students, staff, and faculty from across campus.”*

The reviewers were clearly impressed by the overall alignment with the Learning Center’s Services and the university Mission. They also wrote that the Center was *actively advancing the goal of supporting academic success of students through the variety of resources they offer.*

They also described some of the areas for improvement listed below.

**Important Issues Identified**

The most important issues targeted in the review include:

- Administration and staffing concerns related to collaborative relations with the Writing and Speaking Center, which are co-located with the Learning Center, but report to the College of Arts and Sciences
- Budget issues related to the complex problem of predicting how many students will request tutoring and hiring just enough tutors to fill the need
- Tutor recruitment and staffing issues
- Faculty involvement in Learning Center oversight and offerings
- The need to clarify communication and publicity/outreach related to the multiple tutoring sites on campus
- Professional development and leadership training needs for LC staff
- More administrative and Supervisory support needed

### **Support of Strategic Initiatives**

The reviewers commended us for the way we have incorporated the university's strategic initiatives in the services and programs the center offers. They wrote that *the Center demonstrates a clear commitment to and significant potential in advancing the university's and division's strategic initiatives, goals, and commitments.*

### **Standards and Best Practices**

The reviewers stated that the Learning Center is well aligned with the standards and best practices established by national and international organizations. They wrote that *the Center's standards and practices are largely in alignment with professionally accepted standards set forth by leading professional organizations in the field of academic support, such as the Commission for Academic Support in Higher Education (CASHE), the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), and the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA).*

Since the last program review in 2015 the Learning Center's staff has strived to follow tutor-training certification procedures set by CRLA. The 2024 reviewers noted that the LC training tutor and peer-leader training programs are among the best practices adopted by the center. They acknowledged that our training programs are designed to ensure that students receive adequate exposure to the skills, knowledge, and abilities required to provide peer-facilitated academic support. The reviewers also noted that the center emphasizes active learning and collaborative learning models, which have been shown to enhance student engagement and retention.

### **Resources**

The reviewers noted some pros and cons about the relatively new location in the Gleeson library. They concluded that the space is functioning well for the Learning Center, stating that *the physical environment is highly accessible and conducive to academic engagement, offering a variety of settings that cater to different student needs, from quiet study areas to collaborative workspaces.*

The budget is mostly adequate for the needs and goals of the Learning Center. The difficulty occurs when we do not accurately predict how many students will request tutoring services, resulting in our expenses exceeding our budget. Careful to avoid this situation, the Learning Center director often avoids spending money that could have been used for expanded services. In addition, reviewers suggested looking at the Learning Center scope of projects and support

funding and structure for programs like Project Success, with student referrals mainly coming from Student Disability Services and the Center for Academic and Student Achievement (CASA).

### **Learning Outcomes**

The reviewers were impressed with the work we have done on assessment systems since the 2015 review. They wrote that the center has a robust system for assessing user experience and learning outcomes and noted that we have developed assessments of student satisfaction, faculty feedback, and grade analysis to identify areas for improvement. They also concluded that the results of these assessments clearly indicate that the center is achieving its stated learning outcomes.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

- Provide professional development and leadership skill development opportunities for LC staff, including more consistent supervision
- Strengthen ties with faculty
- Eliminate the term “traditionally difficult courses” from LC communications
- Identify courses for which tutoring will be offered early in the semester
- Share information about SI attendance with faculty
- Establish faculty liaisons for subjects in which tutoring is offered
- Change the reporting structure so that LC director reports to Associate VP
- Eliminate administrative burden on LC staff by co-sharing costs of an expanded administrative arm for all three centers
- Prioritize high-demand courses
- Communicate programs and services more clearly

### **Response to Recommendations**

A five year action plan will be developed to address recommendations, opportunities, and needs identified in the program review process. The Assistant Dean is actively seeking meaningful professional development opportunities for the Learning Center staff. The director and Assistant Dean are brainstorming ideas for improving LC staff and faculty collaboration. An advisory committee proved challenging in 2016 but may work better with different faculty involved. We have also considered asking faculty from various departments heavily involved with Learning Center services to serve as liaisons, advisors or even unofficial co-directors on a rotating basis.

### **Additional Context or Information**

Some challenges we have related to the suggested improvements:

#### Identifying courses with tutors early in the semester.

We certainly try to do this but demand is unpredictable. Currently, we recruit tutors a semester ahead of time even though we do not know how many students will request tutoring in each subject. Tutors prefer to be given a significant number of hours—and if they are offered too few hours they often resign. So we try to hire students who can tutor multiple subjects to help keep them busy. We are commended for our intensive training program—but its length prevents us from recruiting quickly. Also, professors change each semester and tutoring needs vary by professor. Unpredictable “surges”

sometimes occur when new faculty are teaching certain courses. We will continue to work with the Department offices to facilitate communication about course tutors.

#### Prioritize high-demand courses

The Center prioritizes high demand courses and hires tutors accordingly. Many tutor applicants show greater interest in non-high demand courses and faculty refer excellent students that can only tutor low or no-demand courses. We also give preference to applicants who can also tutor subjects other than those that are very high-demand, so that they will be able to work enough hours to make their position worthwhile and worth the effort and time put into their training. Even so, tutor applicants often have limited availability. So, it's a complicated equation we are constantly striving to solve. We will continue to work on these problems and incorporate faculty expectations whenever possible.

#### Eliminate administrative burden on LC staff.

Currently, neither the College of Arts and Sciences or the Division of Student Life are in a position to add clerical staff members. Adding staff positions of any type is highly unlikely to happen in the coming years due to campus-wide budget concerns. We can, however, continue to collaborate with Arts and Sciences' staff to improve efficiency.

#### Changing reporting structure

The Student Life division will consider this recommendation and whether it is likely to be of significant benefit to the Learning Center.

#### Communications

The Learning Center staff will examine communications and consider how they can be improved to help the USF community understand the array of services offered by the LC and distinguish them from other tutoring and similar support services housed in other departments across campus.

#### Share SI attendance with faculty

The Learning Center is committed to maintaining student confidentiality. We do not share attendance information without the written consent of the student. We will discuss this issue with faculty as needed to solve any student outreach issues.