

UAF Student Learning Commons Proposal
Student Academic Development & Achievement Committee
April 2009

RESOLUTION:

The Faculty Senate in support of student retention and success resolves that a comprehensive Student Learning Commons be established on the Fairbanks campus in partnership with the Rasmuson Library. The Student Learning Commons would provide and coordinate tutoring, supplemental instruction, computer-assisted instruction, access to informational and instructional technologies, curricular advising, and counseling to all undergraduate students at UAF. Its technology and information-management capabilities would further extend UAF's reach to include rural students.

1. Rationale

A failure to retain and nurture students obstructs the mission of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, which is to promote excellence, student success and lifelong learning. Faculty, departments, committees and administration confirm that many students entering UAF need assistance in order to succeed. All student-success specialists emphasize that integrated support programs are salutary, achieving levels of campus-wide coordination and partnership that serve to unite a university. Evidence from programs as diverse as Student Support Services Developmental Education, and the Honors program shows that students at all levels of their education at UAF can benefit from a Student Learning Commons. The attached Summary Report from Student Support Services shows that academic standing, retention and degrees earned even among at-risk students increase when solid learning support is available.

The Student Learning Commons is designed to support all students—urban and rural, at risk and gifted—striving for academic excellence. It will provide a centralized location that enhances students' access to learning support services. No program similar to the one being proposed in this initiative presently exists at UAF. The expected outcome of this initiative will be improved student comprehension, retention, and graduation rates, all of which benefit the entire academic and social community leading to increased revenue generation. .

2. Mission

The Student Learning Commons (SLC) will support all UAF students by bringing together a wide range of services to enhance student learning. The UAF SLC will be committed to academic excellence, student success and lifelong learning for the most diverse student population of any university in the country. The SLC will function as an information clearinghouse for tutoring services, academic advising, library research, testing, counseling, and other programs promoting student success. Students will be able to work with trained tutors, librarians and advisors, receive mentoring, and attend

orientations and success workshops at a single locale purposely designed to direct and enrich their educational experience. These services will be available both to local students and to students at a distance.

3. Goals

Students participating in the SLC will develop the skills and attitudes necessary for the attainment of academic, career and life goals, including one or more of the following: increase their knowledge of the subjects they are studying, improve their grades, become proficient in using technology and web resources they need for success, become more aware of how they learn best, and develop positive attitudes and confidence in their ability to learn.

4. Proposed Vision – The hope of a comprehensive learning center is not new. Local centers existed in the various Community Campuses before the consolidation and some still exist. Since the early 90's, a learning support center for the Fairbanks Campus has been proposed by many campus committees and organizations. In 2007, a committee including representation from Department of Developmental Education, the English Department Writing Center, Student Support Services, Rural Student Services, TVC advising, and the Academic Advising Center, developed a plan for a comprehensive learning center that the Student Learning Commons would be modeled on. In the past, the major stumbling block for such proposals has been space. With the Library's cooperation, that space would be available and the Student Learning Commons could become a reality.

The following is the model for the Student Learning Commons:

Personnel

A full-time coordinator with a background in learning theory will be in charge of choosing the tutors, training the tutors, scheduling lab hours and organizing tutors, but the tutors will be funded and referred by their respective departments. Assistance from librarians familiar with searching and evaluating information resources will be another component. A full-time administrative assistant will also be needed to support the SLC. A full-time computer technician familiar with educational applications of technology will be needed. The technician will also be utilized by the Writing Center and other identified places which currently cannot afford to keep a technician on staff full-time.

Other professionals assigned to the SLC include the following: a counselor from the Center for Health and Counseling (shared), a learning disabilities specialist (part-time), English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching assistants (part-time), a financial advisor from Financial Aid (shared), and CRLA certified tutors.

Services

To support student success and improve student learning at UAF, a student learning commons located within the Rasmuson Library will provide integrated services to enhance individual and group learning experiences. Most of the library literature about learning commons confirms “The news from the front lines is that the information commons established in college and university libraries are a success. These new spaces are wildly popular with students . . .” (Spencer, M. [2006] “Evolving a new model: the information commons,” *Reference Services Review*, 34 (2), 242-7). The UAF Student Learning Commons integrates personal help, instructional and information technologies, and versatile space. This triad enables students to: conceptualize the work for their courses and related learning activities; search for and evaluate information to support their developing ideas; create projects and presentations (including collaboration by groups); bring their work into final production (including multimedia and print production); assess and improve their study skills; learn new information technologies; and be tutored in a variety of disciplines. Development and uses of these learning support components will require collaboration among library personnel, student services throughout UAF, academic departments, and OIT.

The SLC will include its own tutoring center for math, reading, writing, study skills and computer usage. Eventually the existing Writing Center, Speech Center, Developmental Math Lab and the Chapman Math Lab might all be folded into the SLC in order to offer these core-support services at one site. While departments and other service providers will function with different degrees of autonomy, the SLC will encourage synergy. The Student Learning Commons would also be a useful resource for faculty in developing their own instructional materials, and as a venue for some class meetings. A Center for Instructional Design housed in the Rasmuson Library in the near future would be welcome partners with the SLC in creative instructional innovations to help both faculty and students.

The personalized help portion of the triad will require specialized contributions from faculty, librarians, tutors, student services personnel, and IT staff. Students will be able to work with tutors on writing skills, presentation skills, study skills, software uses and web applications. Librarians will provide help with effectively researching topics, locating resources, and evaluating information. Instruction in information literacy will be essential and will reinforce UAF’s core curriculum goals. Communication and collaboration among these service providers should be nearly seamless in helping the students. Workshops and similar instructional sessions shall be provided.

Sessions will be offered addressing student success at every level. This will include sessions on how to write different types of lab reports and research papers, as well as how to use computers for research. Student-success sessions—currently offered by Academic Advising and the Developmental Education Department, including various study skills and time management—will be incorporated as well as sessions on motivation, textbook reading, memory improvement and critical thinking skills. Workshops on ESL, math, English and reading skills will be available too. First-year orientation classes will be

developed by the SLC including Supplemental Instruction and linked courses. In addition, a mentoring program pairing new students with more experienced students will be developed. Students will also be able to take tests on various topics such as learning styles and math, English, reading and study skills preparedness. The SLC will house a testing center for assessment, make-up and mastery testing.

Information and instructional technologies form the second part of the triad. The SLC will be an online-learning facility, as well as employ PowerPoint or video presentations, in order to provide students with in-depth information complementing student-success sessions. Workshops on standard productivity software, multimedia software, and collaborative web technologies shall be provided. PC's, Mac's, printers and scanners shall be available, along with wireless networking so that students can utilize their own laptops. Technical help will assist with use of a variety of software and newly developing web technologies, as well as providing the foundation for maintaining the hardware, software, and network connectivity.

The third part of the triad involves spaces for students (singly or teamed) to learn in collaboration with each other as well as to meet with the personnel and use the technologies. We envision an area for students to use the available computers or their own laptops, but it is also an area with flexible furnishings for small and medium-sized groups to work together. Group study rooms and presentation practice rooms with projectors and white boards are essential in the Commons. A smart classroom for instruction sessions, a computer lab for workshops, and spaces for tutoring activities and for in-depth collaborations with support/instruction personnel would all contribute to student success.

In its role as an information clearinghouse, the SLC will include specific information on the following services already established at UAF: specific departments offering tutoring or labs, residential advising and tutoring offered in dormitories, the Student Support Services program, Rural Student Services, Disability Services, the Center for Health and Counseling, the Registrar, Financial Aid, the Academic Advising Center and the TVC Student Assistance and Advising Center, and learning assistance programs offered at all UAF rural campuses. A webpage presenting the SLC and its services will also explain the options available to Distance Education students, such as the Math Hotline (telephonic tutoring), Whiteboard (computer program used for distance tutoring), and Telefax Tutoring (used by the Writing Center).

Assessment

The SLC will include a built-in self-assessment process to measure its effect on student learning and retention. Information gathered will be used to modify services offered by the SLC. For instance, student usage of the SLC can be tracked via computer software such as AccuTrack.

The goals of the commons are to provide: coordinated learning support for all students at UAF; timely advising by trained advisors; tutoring for students in key courses by trained tutors; and tutoring labs (Math Lab, Writing Center, Developmental Math Lab, Developmental Writing Lab etc.) in areas where significant numbers of students need assistance to pass courses.

The expected outcomes are as follows: students will use the available learning support activities; students will be directed to appropriate support activities throughout the UAF system; advising will be available for students within two business days of request; students using tutors 5 or more times during the semester will be successful in courses tutored at a rate at least as high as the general student population taking that course; and students regularly using tutoring labs will be successful in courses tutored at a rate at least as high as the general student population taking that course.

Definition of Success

Success for Student Learning Commons will result in	Students contacting the learning Commons will be directed to appropriate learning services and will utilize those various learning support activities
Successful advising will result in	Students seeking advising at critical times during the semester and receiving advising assistance such as learning support referrals, registration assistance, and other services in a timely manner.
Successful individual tutoring (when a student attends 5 or more hours) will result in	Students completing the tutored course with a “C” or higher.
Successful group tutoring (where a student regularly attends sessions) will result in	Students completing the tutored course with a “C” or higher.
Successful provision of tutors or faculty instructors as individual tutors or in group tutoring sessions.	All tutors will be trained and certified as CRLA tutors or will be appropriate level faculty.

Outcomes Data

Type of data	Collected by	Time of collection
Semester referral to services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total headcount Unduplicated headcount 	Student Learning Commons	Throughout the semester
Individual Tutoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total headcount Number of hours attended by individual students 	Tutoring unit	Throughout the semester
Student* grades in tutored	Tutoring unit	End of each semester

course.		
Group Tutoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total headcount • Number of hours attended by individual students 	Tutoring unit	Throughout the semester
Student # grades in tutored course.	Department	End of semester
Tutor training records	Tutor training unit	Each semester
Faculty vita	Tutoring unit	As faculty are assigned to tutoring unit
Faculty Referrals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of faculty referring students • Number of new faculty referrals 	Student Learning Commons	Throughout semester

* students participating in 5 or more individual tutoring sessions

students regularly participating in group tutoring sessions

5. Implementation

If this Student Academic Development & Achievement Committee vision is compelling and accepted, we recommend that another committee be formed to continue investigating learning commons in other institutions; to begin conversations with appropriate faculty, student organizations, OIT and student support services to further identify and articulate their needs and garner their support; and to gather additional data about space, staffing, collaborations, assessment, and funding required of UAF in order to achieve viability and practicability for its Student Learning Commons.

Administrative support is needed to move ahead towards implementation. Both immediate and 5-year funding will be needed. Questions to be answered during this phase include the following: Where will the funding come from and is it sustainable? When will significant space become available in Rasmuson Library? What renovations will be needed within the Rasmuson Library building (networking, power, lighting, walls)? Who will pay for staff? What equipment, supplies, and furniture will we need?

The Rasmuson Library—conveniently located near other integral UAF computing, service, and instructional functions—currently has 30 computers on its main floor and 12 more on other floors to be used for searching for information. As of March 2009 seven of these computers also have MS Office software, and the rest have Open Office software. Possibly another 20 would be needed for the additional work on papers, projects and presentations expected in a learning commons. Additional specialized software applications (e.g. Photoshop, Final Cut Pro, statistical software, GIS software) could be required for student work in some disciplines. An area with equipment for final production

of papers, projects, presentations should include printers, photocopiers, a flatbed scanner, possibly equipment for oversize and color productions and should be conveniently close to the computers. The current instructional computer lab is heavily utilized now for library instruction sessions, OIT training sessions, and other campus training. A second instruction lab is essential.

The Media Classroom will need to be supplemented by another, smaller smart classroom. To the current group study rooms (currently 2 are available on Level 3, and 2 on Level 5) would need to be added 4 small rooms (for individual tutoring, testing, and storage) located near each other on the same floor. Additional flexible space for individual tutoring is desirable.

Office space for the SLC coordinator and the administrative assistant is necessary. Service points for Library Reference services and technical help should be merged into one service point with more tech training for the librarians. Several learning commons use paraprofessionals and peer tutors for providing some of these services.

After sustainable funding and facilities have been acquired and renovations to space are completed, the SLC will be set up and its services will be initiated. Tasks during this stage might include, among others, hiring a coordinator and support staff, deciding which services want to be folded into the SLC and which want to remain autonomous, coordinating the efforts of the various support programs already in existence, hiring and certifying tutors, setting up workshops and filming them for online use, creating a web page, setting up an online learning center, and directing students to the commons.

Student Support Services Program

University of Alaska Fairbanks

Program Overview

The **Student Support Services (SSS)** program provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with college requirements, and serves to motivate students towards the successful completion of their degree program. The program is funded by a TRIO Grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

All services are provided free of charge to eligible students. Our program is staffed with both professional and certified student tutors.

To receive SSS program services, a student must have academic need and meet one of the following criteria:

Our services include:

- drop-in tutoring center
- instruction in mathematics skills
- tutorial services
- academic advising and mentoring
- cultural and social engagement
- loan program for laptop computers, and other media
- direct financial assistance to qualified Pell Grant recipients

- Financially limited according to federal criteria.

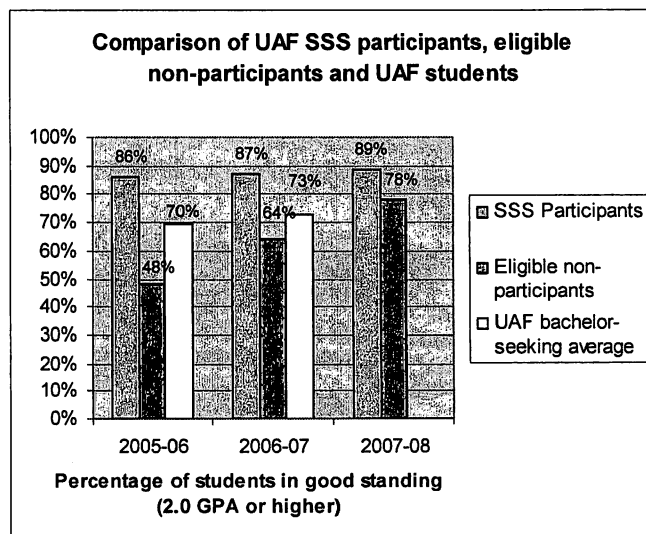
- A first-generation college student (meaning neither parent has earned a Bachelor's degree)

- A student with a documented physical or learning disability

Participants must also be enrolled in at least six hours of academic study, and intend to obtain a Bachelor's degree.

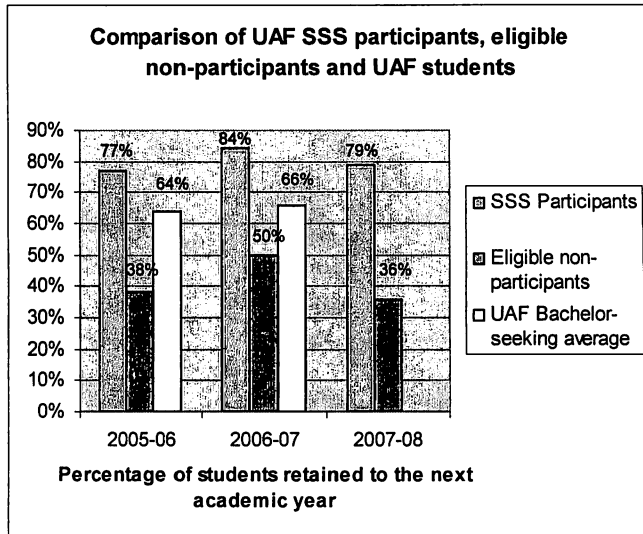
Good Academic Standing

Similarly, the percentage of students in good standing (GPA \geq 2.0) each year is higher for SSS participants than for potentially eligible but non participating students and baccalaureate seeking students generally.



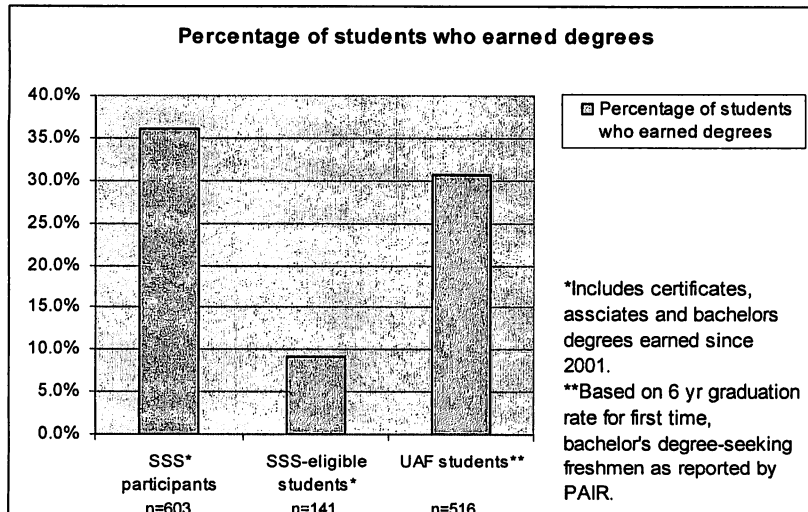
Retention

Participating SSS students have been retained at a higher rate than UAF baccalaureate students who enroll at least half-time and also at a higher rate than potentially eligible but non-participating students.



DEGREES EARNED BY SSS STUDENTS

Since its inception in 2001, the SSS program at UAF has served 603 students. Those **603 students** have earned **217 degrees** from UAF (Certificate, Associate and Baccalaureate included.) During that same time period 141 students were eligible for the program, but chose not to receive services (the control group.) Those 141 students have earned only 13 degrees from UAF.



Current grant program demographics by year (2005-2008)

(Federally funded to serve 160 students annually)

2005 – 2006

Total new participants = 92

Program Qualification	
Disabled	12
Disabled and low income	10
First generation only	28
Low income and first generation	91
Low income only	19

Age range in years	# of students
0-21	32
22-26	40
27-35	38
36-45	29
46-55	18
56+	3

Gender	
Female	116
Male	44

Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	43
Asian	4
Black or African-American	13
Hispanic or Latino	5
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2
More than one race reported	8
Other or non-disclosed	4
White	81

2006 – 2007

Total new participants = 91

Program Qualification	
Disabled	14
Disabled and low income	11
First generation only	26
Low income and first generation	90
Low income only	16

Age range in years	# of students
0-21	45
22-26	27
27-35	38
36-45	30
46-55	17
56+	0

Gender	
Female	112
Male	45

Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	31
Asian	6
Black or African-American	15
Hispanic or Latino	7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1
More than one race reported	1
Other or non-disclosed	9
White	87

2007 – 2008

Total new participants = 61

Program Qualification	
Disabled	15
Disabled and low income	14
First generation only	26
Low income and first generation	82
Low income only	18

Age range in years	# of students
0-21	45
22-26	35
27-35	34
36-45	27
46-55	12
56+	2

Gender	
Female	113
Male	42

Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	30
Asian	7
Black or African-American	17
Hispanic or Latino	9
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1
More than one race reported	1
Other or non-disclosed	6
White	84