COMMUNITY COLLEGE FORUM

Tutoring and Academic Support Services

Organization and Coordination

Custom Research Brief

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I. Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What are the components of academic support offered to students at other institutions? Who organizes support services?
- Who are the direct providers of academic support services to students? What is the reporting structure in place for academic support services? Which administrators are in charge of hiring and managing support providers?
- What are the current physical arrangements of academic support services? Are support programs co-located with other programs?
- How do students access academic support services at other institutions? Can students schedule appointments with tutors, or do centers provide walk-in hours? What components are offered online?
- Are academic support programs at other institutions certified? If so, what motivated administrators to certify services, and what have been the results of certification? What metrics do administrators collect to measure the success of academic support services? What outcomes have administrators identified?
- What is the relationship at other institutions between academic support and mandatory developmental classes? Who is responsible for the coordination of academic services and developmental classes?
- How do academic support services differ across disciplines?
- How do administrators at other institutions communicate academic support program goals and outcomes with faculty and staff

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- Advisory Board's internal and online research libraries (www.educationadvisoryboard.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/)
- Institutional websites and policies
- "ITTPC Certification Requirements," College Learning and Reading Association, http://www.crla.net/ittpc/certification_requirements.htm
- "Overview of Supplemental Instruction," The International Center for Supplemental Instruction at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, http://www.umkc.edu/asm/si/overview.shtml

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Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed academic support program directors at midsize community colleges.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Enrollment (Undergraduate)	Carnegie Classification
College A	South Large City	14,000	Associate's--Public Rural-serving Large
College B	South Midsize City	9,000	Associate's--Public Rural-serving Large
College C	South Rural Fringe	7,000	Associate's--Public Rural-serving Medium
College D	South Midsize City	15,000	Associate's—Public Rural-serving Large
College E	Mid-Atlantic Midsize City	11,000	Associate's--Public Suburban-serving Single Campus
College F	South Rural Fringe	8,500	Associate's--Public Suburban-serving Single Campus

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II. Executive Overview

Key Observations

Students access face-to-face academic support across disciplines through on-campus labs with walk-in hours, as well as department-affiliated student tutors with regular appointments. In tutoring labs, staff members oversee computers and library services for students, while student tutors schedule weekly hours in labs for individual course support. Faculty members schedule weekly office hours in labs and provide walk-in support.

Academic support program directors hire and manage lab staff as well as student peer tutors. Student tutors receive faculty recommendations to work in campus labs, and must demonstrate course expertise and exceed a minimum GPA. Outside the labs, many departments also hire student tutors as individualized service providers; these students directly report to and receive compensation from their respective departments.

Tutoring centers' online support components assist distance learners, working students, and students seeking support outside of normal operating hours. Essay editing remains the most popular function of online tutoring services. Third party vendors, such as Smarthinking™, provide tutoring support across academic disciplines 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Academic support program directors hire adjunct faculty and graduate students located remotely to supplement on-campus support during weekends or outside of normal operating hours.

Mandatory developmental courses and tutoring services are not always co-located, but academic support directors coordinate services through faculty recommendation and instruction, supplemental instruction in tutoring lab space, and combined offerings such as math emporium labs. Academic departments organize and control remedial courses, and they often share space or personnel with generalized tutoring services. Colleges also offer Supplemental Instruction (SI) courses, where students lead small voluntary group sessions in courses with high failure rates (e.g., introductory biology and calculus). SI courses may take place in tutoring labs, and SI session leaders sometimes work as generalized tutors.

Although many students prefer online essay submission for writing support, face-to-face support remains the norm for most disciplines, and all profiled institutions offer a variation of the popular self-guided mathematics emporium model. Students are comfortable going to faculty with general and basic concept questions, but seek out peer tutors with similar recent experiences for more complex, high-level topics.

Few institutions collect metrics on the relative success of tutoring methods, but program directors study overall rates of student access to gauge demand for services. Program directors express interest in more qualitative assessment, but most lack the technological resources to track outcomes effectively. At **College D**, AccuTrack records student access, classes studied, time in and out, tutor involved, session type (i.e., group or individual), grades, retention rates, and other student success metrics pre- and post-session. This tracking system allows program directors to remain flexible and responsive to student needs, and also helps maintain the trust and support of faculty members and administrators.

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III. Organization of Academic Support

Face-to-Face Tutoring

Tutoring Labs Offer Walk-In Support across Disciplines

Tutoring labs serve as the primary component of academic support across profiled institutions. These labs take on a variety of forms and provide support across academic disciplines. At most institutions, a central tutoring services director organizes labs, and reports to a senior administrator of student or academic affairs.

Labs Vary in Staff Level and Subject Area

Learning support labs consist of 30 to 80 computers, some of which are designated for testing, and space for one-on-one and group tutoring sessions. Many labs are located close to or within the main campus library, and may contain specialized equipment for supported courses (e.g., anatomical models for anatomy courses, physical molecular models for chemistry). The graphic below compares key components of on-campus labs. Listed hours are the maximum among labs on the same campus; not all labs will be open for the full time.

Tutoring Lab Components

Institution	Staffing	Subjects	Student Access
College A	• Tutorial coordinator • 17 subject coordinators • One work-study student • Student and faculty tutors	• Accounting & Economics • Biology • Biotechnology • Chemistry • Information Technology • ESL • Early Childhood Education • Math • Physics • Spanish • Statistics • Writing	Walk-in M-F 9:00 am-5:00 pm
College B	• Four full-time administrative staff • Approximately 75 part-time tutors and front desk staff	• Reading & Writing • Math • Natural Sciences	Appointment-only M-F 8:00 am-8:00 pm Sat. 10:00 am-2:00 pm
College C	• Two full-time administrative staff • Adjunct faculty • Student tutors	• Math • Science • Social Science • Foreign Languages • Writing	Walk-in M-F 8:00 am-4:30 pm
College D	• Faculty (office hours) • Full- and part-time professional tutors • Academic counselor	• Math • Science • Accounting • Reading and Writing • ESL	Walk-in M-F 7:30 am-9:00 pm Sat. 10:00 am-2:00 pm

At **College B**, state rules on full-time equivalent hours and tutoring budgets mandate students to sign up for weekly tutoring hours; no walk-in times are available.

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At **College F**, campus tutoring labs for math and science are organized and controlled directly by the respective department chairs.

College E	• Full-time staff tutors (in three labs) • Students in a peer tutoring center	• Math Lab • Writing Lab • Technology Learning Center • Peer Tutoring Center	Walk-in (Math, Writing, Tech), peer tutoring by appointment M-F 8:00 am-6:00 pm
College F	• Faculty office hours • Student tutors	• Math & Science Lab • Language Center	Walk-in M-F 9:00 am-7:00 pm Sat. 8:00 am-5:00 pm

Faculty, Student Tutors, and Administrative Staff Provide Lab Support

Support providers in on-campus labs include a broad range of age, experience, and duties. Students walk in for generalized assistance during regular open hours.

Support Providers in On-Campus Labs

- **Faculty**: Faculty members hold a portion of instruction inside on-campus labs and schedule regular hours inside labs to assist students that need additional support. At **College A**, all full-time math professors hold open tutoring hours in the learning center. Although faculty work inside tutoring labs, they report to and are paid by academic departments.
- **Student tutors**: Program directors vet, hire, and pay students to serve as tutors. Student tutors are approved for single subject areas.
- **Professional tutors:** Tutors with significant subject area experience (e.g., retired or adjunct faculty, graduate students, college graduates) provide support with general tutoring. Professional on-campus tutors work on a full- or part-time basis.
- **Administrative staff**: Staff members manage lab schedules, tutoring hours, and maintain the physical and technological aspects of campus labs. These staff sometimes also hire and manage student tutors. At several institutions, students with work-study grants fulfill clerical and greeting duties.

Certify Tutoring Staff to Strengthen Services and Gain Faculty Support

Full- and part-time professional tutors at **College D** are certified under College Remedial Learning Association (CRLA) guidelines.[1] Tutors are divided into cohorts of four to five and meet every other week during regular working hours to review specified topic areas (e.g., working with difficult students, non-verbal communication skills). There are three levels of certification, all of which take around one year to complete. Permanent staff organize cohorts, lead CRLA training sessions, and post training documents online for staff access. Faculty and departments appreciate the expertise and standard practices of certified tutors, and will recommend and take advantage of Learning Commons resources when tutors clarify qualifications.

[1] "ITTPC Certification Requirements," College Learning and Reading Association, http://www.crla.net/ittpc/certification_requirements.htm

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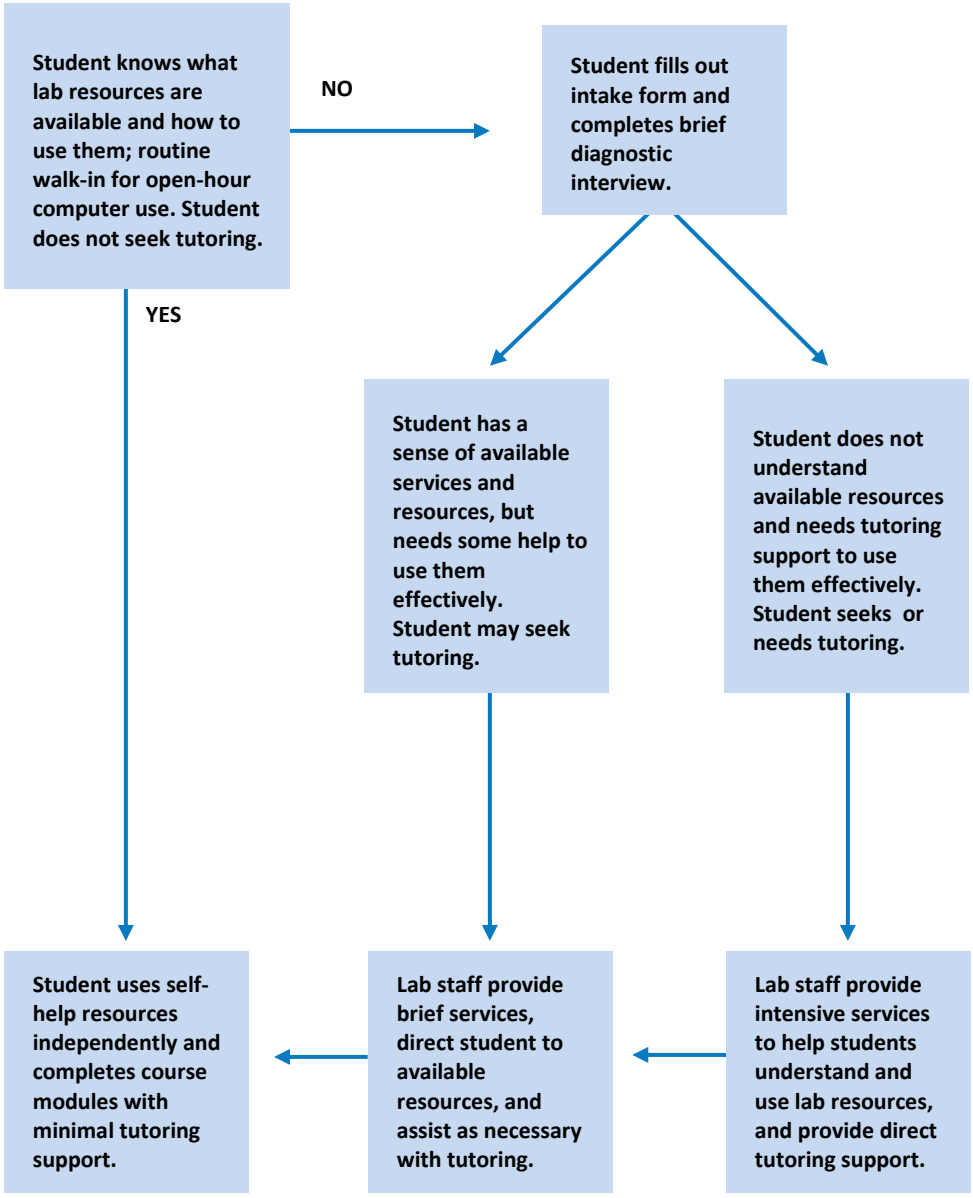
Identify Learning Ability to Route Students Effectively

Effective walk-in support depends on the ability of tutoring centers to route student requests quickly and efficiently. Academic support program directors at **College D** proposed the model below in a national presentation on academic support services.

Routing Students to Tutoring Services at *College D*



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Peer Tutors Offer Support for Specific Courses

Although many student tutors work inside academic support labs, some academic faculty may control the structure and content of tutoring services and hire separate student tutors. In addition, offices for students with disabilities often hire and manage separate groups of peer tutors that are available across subject areas. The development of dedicated tutoring centers independent of academic departments is fairly recent; most profiled programs are less than five years old.

Value of Student Tutors

"We recruit student tutors whenever possible… given that these students in order to tutor have typically been through that class in recent years with an A or B, they're much closer to what students coming in for help are experiencing."

- Forum Interview

Peer-to-peer tutoring is most common in more advanced courses that require significant abstract thinking (e.g., high level math, foreign language). Common requirements for student tutors are described below.

Common Requirements for Peer Tutors

- **Gain approval from faculty member or tutoring coordinator for course subject**: The approval process may involve written recommendation or proficiency test prescribed by subject area coordinator.
- **Achieve course success**: Peer tutors always demonstrate proficiency in their subject area, usually with an 'A' or 'B' in recent course completion. Students that demonstrate exceptional success (i.e., top grades and strong faculty recommendation) at **College F** may participate in courses and provide tutoring support concurrently.
- **Overall GPA requirements:** In addition to individual course success, students must maintain a minimum GPA between 2.5 and 3.0.
- **Pass background check**: At **College A**, where student tutor requirements are the most rigorously defined, potential peer tutors must pass a background check before providing academic support.
- **Complete skills training**: Permanent staff and academic support program directors direct regular training sessions for tutors to explain techniques for group and individual instruction.
- **Sign up for regular hours**: Student peer tutors schedule regular hours to provide support in individual subject areas. At most profiled institutions, these hours are posted for the coming semester.

Online Academic Support

Online Resources Provide Additional Support Outside of Campus Hours

Program directors offer some academic support components online to assist students who require access outside of normal office hours. Across profiled institutions, most students that leverage online support services need help with writing essays. Although all contacts note interest in internet resources as a supplement to brick and mortar academic support, some contacts express reservations about how to track the usage and efficacy of online resources, especially if online resources make students less likely to seek one-on-one help.

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Online Support Resources

Resource	Support Providers	Student Access
Third Party Vendors: Academic affairs administrator manages contract for a fixed number of tutoring sessions per semester.	• Companies like Smarthinking™ offer live support across subject areas, charging by subject and per tutoring session. • Vendors hire and manage tutors independently.	• Students access tutoring support through campus portals and third party websites. • Many third party vendors provide 24-hour access to support.
Local Online Tutors: Academic support program director hires students, graduates, and adjunct professors as part-time tutors.	• Graduates or retired faculty member monitor online drop boxes for essay submissions. • Local online tutors supplement or replace some third party contracts, especially in writing courses.	• Students upload assignments through web portals or email at any time, and expect response within 24-36 hours. At **College A**, remote tutoring through text, Skype, and phone is in development.
Website Links: Academic support websites offer access to general education links as well as study skills video tutorials.	• Lab staff upload and maintain links to off-campus resources (e.g., Online Writing Lab). • Tutors create videos and PowerPoint presentations to teach study skills.	• Students access links through program webpage, at home or in labs.

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IV. Coordination among Departments

Developmental and Support Courses

Academic Departments Organize Mandatory Remedial Courses

Across profiled institutions, developmental courses are organized and maintained by their respective academic departments. Student performance on national standardized tests and institutional entrance exams determines placement within remedial courses, which must be completed before students can take classes at the college level. Whether or not the same senior administrator oversees both tutoring and remedial courses, students in these developmental classes frequently seek tutoring support. For this reason, many remedial labs also function as tutoring centers.

Tutoring and Developmental Courses May Share Campus Resources

The physical setting of remedial courses depends on the technology and resources required; in developmental mathematics, self-guided weekly tutorials (using programs such as Pearson Education's MyMathLab) supplement classroom learning. Students complete tutorials in on-campus labs during regularly scheduled hours. At most institutions, department faculty that teach remedial courses also schedule one class period and a portion of office hours in designated labs to oversee and assist students through programs. The coordination between tutorial and remedial services ranges from close cooperation to wide separation.

Two Models of Coordination between Services

Leveraging Tutoring Center Resources for Remedial Courses	After program directors of the reading, math, and science labs consolidated into one facility six years ago, all remedial classes at **College D** schedule at least a portion of class time in the tutoring center. Faculty from all departments schedule office hours and open tutoring time in the tutoring center, and students seek help with any class during walk-in hours.
No Explicit Coordination between Tutoring Services and Remedial Courses	At **College E**, academic support is divided into four separate centers; a Math Center, Writing Center, Technology Learning Center, and a Peer Tutoring Center. In the Math and Writing Centers, full-time staff members offer general walk-in support, but there is no connection with individual remedial courses. In the Peer Tutoring Center, students must schedule appointments for specific courses, and there is no special or regular support for remedial classes.

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Supplemental Instruction Provides Safety Net for High-Risk Classes

Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions are a relatively new approach to student support, modeled after a program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.[1] Institutions offer SI for introductory courses with the highest failure and withdrawal rates (e.g., introductory biology, chemistry, calculus). Professors select high-performing students to lead SI sessions, which are always voluntary and occur during normal class hours. Although most SI sessions are organized under the academic department where they take place, several institutions organize tutorial services in parallel with SI programs; at **College B**, students double as SI leaders and peer tutors in the academic support lab.

Communicating Programs across Campus

Demonstrate Value for Students to Gain Faculty Support

Academic support program directors at profiled institutions face a common challenge in involving academic faculty in tutoring programs. Although professors that teach mandatory developmental courses might spend many working hours in tutoring labs, other faculty members may have little interaction with tutoring. Part of the problem is historical; many programs are less than five years old, and faculty already offer direct support through office hours and course tutorials that are under their direct control. When reaching out to faculty members for support, contacts recommend creative promotion of services as well as formal partnerships with academic units.

Tactics for Effective Communication

Advertise Programs in Variety of Media	At **College B**, program directors make direct presentations to faculty groups, send out regular email and paper updates on services and schedules, upload videos and links with resources for struggling students, and send student tutors to vocally advertise at campus events.
Partner with Academic Units to Provide Support	Program directors at **College A** form partnerships with academic faculty by offering facilities and other resources; developmental faculty offer to serve as part-time tutors if the tutoring center will house and facilitate remedial courses.
Form Permanent Working Relationship with Departments	When the independent math, reading, and science tutoring labs at **College D** consolidated into a single facility**,** the centers' directors selected a faculty member in each department to serve an on advisory committee and asked all department chairs for input on the new tutoring center. When the center was established, all departments shifted tutoring services to the Learning Commons. Today, Learning Commons staff serve as liaisons with a seat at all academic department meetings, to ensure that department needs continue to be met.

[1] "Overview of Supplemental Instruction," The International Center for Supplemental Instruction at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, http://www.umkc.edu/asm/si/overview.shtml.

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