Committee Meeting Report

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<th>Committee</th>
<th>Learning Skills Viability Committee</th>
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<td>Participants</td>
<td>Daniel Marlos, Kathleen Beaufait, Mary Anne DesVignes, Susan Matranga, Donna Morley, Allen Joyce, Robert Vangor, Miriam Jannol, Adeniyi Adeleye, Oni Adunni, Ronald Glass, Huong Dao. Guest(s): Armenuhi Juharyan</td>
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• Learning Skills Faculty Interviews
  o MaryAnne DesVignes: The questions that the committee will be asking us were e-mailed to you. The viability study has been extended.
  o Dan Marlos: this viability study has been called by the administration. The committee members have been struggling to understand why this viability study was called for. There will be an open forum, and you will all be invited to come and give your input. Today we need the faculty feedback on a few simple questions:
    1. Identify the Learning Skills Department’s major strengths.
    2. Identify the Learning Skills Department’s major weaknesses.
  o Faculty: We serve as a gateway for our students who are returning to school; and many of our students are struggling with life issues and challenges simply because they lack basic skills. One of our strengths is that we empower our students. We test them first to find out what their strengths and weaknesses are, and we target what areas of weakness our students have.
  o Faculty: one of our major strengths is one-on-one individualized instructional approach; we actually get to know our students; we find out what their strengths and weaknesses are; we are more flexible in time vs. to regular classroom instructors who are required to go strictly by the dates on the syllabus; if we feel that the student is not ready to move on, we give them the extra time to develop the mastery before moving on to the next level.
  o Faculty: We are an open access college; and some students are not prepared for college, and this is the place where they can start at. Some of them do really well and move on, others don’t. But it’s really important to provide them with a place where they can make a start. We are a great support for those students.
  o Faculty: #1 major strength is that we have an orientation session that equips students with what Learning Skills Department is, what services we provide, the enrollment policies, logging in and out, and obtaining textbook materials. It’s important for students to be oriented so that they know what they are doing here in the Learning Skills department. We oriented over 800 students; that is student success; it did help improvement. Another aspect is that Ms. Des Vignes and I worked during the intersession and had a great success. We have proof that some students increased 5 levels in reading during 5 weeks; that’s student success. The next aspect is individualized instruction; self-paced learning; non-readers may be embarrassed in regular classes, but here in Learning Skills center students have privacy. We create academic intervention- all our students are tested; we have a locator test (screening test), TABE test. We encourage and support students. We have a GED program in partnership with CalWorks program. Our students don’t have to go to adult school; they can work on their AA and GED at the same time. We are constantly working with the specialists at OSS. We are here to help students with academic deficiencies, so that when they leave us, they have improved in their academic skills, and it is student success. The TEAS (Test of Essential Academic Skills) is a test that Nursing students must take and pass, and we help them in preparing for that test. We are proud to say that number one nursing student comes for the Learning Skills Department. We remediate. Nursing students come here for help in Diet Analysis class. I’ve personally trained most of the Dietetic students for their board exams, and they have good results. We interview them, we help them with
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their résumé and cover letter. Dr. Kendis teaches Math 10 class which is English as a second language for math classes. Through this course, students have been able to improve their math skills. Many students have math anxiety; that is why that class was created 25 years ago. We access the students, we prescribe, we do an academic plan, and the students leave the Learning Skills department equipped with basic skills.

- Faculty: I want to stress out the Humanitarian needs of our students that we fulfill. Donna mentioned that we are an open door college. Some people wake up in the morning and don’t know what to do, so they come to Learning Skills center to do their assigned work. Of course not all students are getting their degrees or transferring to 4-year colleges, but there’s a group of students who are being saved from the potential of ending up in jails.

- Faculty: We don’t get any support from the Administration. When the school fails, they jump on us; they are looking for excuses. Students not doing well on achievement tests are blamed on Learning Skills. This place is the hope of the students. Without us they won’t be able to take college ready classes. We have many success stories. Many departments won’t exist if we don’t exist because students will not be able to make those classes. You shouldn’t compare us with other Learning Skills programs because they don’t do what we do. We teach classes and we tutor students. Learning Skills centers at other colleges are not the same as us. We are a department. We teach, we tutor, and we correct papers. We give our students many opportunities to succeed. We don’t give up on our students. They work, they contribute to society, and they pay taxes. The administration is just looking for excuses. How are they going to make us efficient when we are understaffed? Learning Skills is a tested program, and it is successful. We are a good program, and we are going to continue to be a good program. When your union officials come to you, ask them questions. If you ask the right questions, they will think again. Don’t think that because it’s not your department, it’s ok because today it’s Learning Skills department, tomorrow it may be your department.

- Faculty: Our Learning Skills is one of the first Learning Skills Programs in California, and we are the only one in our District.

- Faculty: I admire the basic structure of the Learning Skills department and its individualized supportive approach. Many of our students struggle with math; and the math classes are designed to cover the topics quickly. What the Learning Skills does it provides the students an opportunity to work on their own level, improve their basic skills in order to move on.

- Faculty: We get to help students who cannot survive in their classes. In many math classes the math instructors want to cut the number of students as quickly as possible and many of them have stated to the students on the first day of class that a lot of them shouldn’t be here, and that half of the class will drop after the first test. They don’t want these students; their classes are overcrowded in the first week of class, and they want to cut them down. We do the opposite here. We want to help them; we find out where they are and give them the materials they need, provide tutors, encourage them, and give them a sense of accomplishment. The instructors in regular classes have to cover the outline and move on quickly. What we do is we test, teach, and re-test to make sure they are ready to move on to the next concept. We don’t get rid of our students. We are unique in how we help our students.

- Faculty: We have a very strong tutoring program. Our student workers are doing an excellent job; they are sensitive to our students’ needs. We have an excellent chair person, excellent math and English instructors, and we are necessary and needed here. Often times we stay overtime to help our students. We are not going to let our program diminish. We have a lot of referrals that come to us, and we are doing an excellent job in what we are doing.

- Faculty (he had e-mailed Ms. Des Vignes his answers to the questions from the committee):
  - Major Strengths:
    - We help the students with the most needs with the least skills. These students have dreams and goals, and our faculty, tutors, and staff help them achieve those dreams and goals, in the
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original and vanishing spirit of the Open Door campus.

- Every department on campus sends us its students that can’t complete necessary courses.
- We diagnose each student’s skills in math and literacy through specific testing.
- Our tests help our faculty in their one-on-one interview with each student to better diagnose and prescribe appropriate courses provided by this Department.
- We assist the students in succeeding in their coursework with stage testing, instructor availability, and tutorial assistance.

- **Major Weaknesses:**
  1. Lack of respect for our student, our tutors, and our faculty
  2. Modernizing the delivery of our course offerings
  3. Lack of online content
  4. Lack of online content developed through campus-wide co-operation.
  5. Lack of funding which leads to:
      1. Lack of tutors
      2. Lack of basic supplies and operating office equipment like photocopiers and printers.

  - **Faculty:** We provide 1 unit class for math; we have 10A, 10B, and 10C. This is an advantage for the students because sometimes they come to us and say they just want to review fractions; then we can test them and enroll in the appropriate math course that is only 1 unit.

  - **Faculty:** Another strength is the length of time that our instructors have been here. We have all been working here together for a long time, and that’s a strength.

  - **Faculty:** At the end of each year we meet with our faculty as a group to discuss and try new things to improve every year. We discuss what needs to be changed or improved. We are constantly trying to re-invent and improve our program.

  - **Faculty:** I am an adjunct faculty. I’ve been working here over 20 years. I used to work 9 hours, but now it’s only 3 hours a week; it’s not even worth to come in, but I still do because we are a family. We do more than it costs. If the administrators are looking for faults, then they should come and look around, sit there and watch how we work; the full time faculty is extremely overloaded because of the lack of the adjunct faculty. We need feedback from the administration on what we can do better if anything.

  - **Faculty:** Our department has been consistently underfunded. We have been underfunded because we had a retirement that never got replaced. Then after 25 years of us teaching 15 hour teaching loads, it appeared that according to the contract our faculty must teach 25 hours, and therefore we were not provided with adjuncts. 24 hours of adjuncts have been cut, that’s 8 classes. The impact it has is:
    1. I have not done my galleys.
    2. I have not done my seniority list.
    3. I have no release time because the more you cut the FTE, the less release time I get.
    4. I’ve fallen below the contractual amount.
    5. I’m in the reading lab now; I’m never in my office.
    6. We are serving 2,100 students with only four full time faculty.
    7. We have 50 students in LS 1A, 33 in LS 1B, 22 in LS 1C, 40 in LS1C (we have two sections of 1C), 65 in LS 2A, 52 in LS 3C, and these are just language arts classes. I only have Oni, Bruce, and Miriam one morning each. I have fifteen students at a time sitting and waiting for me to be seen. It’s very intense.
    8. A major weakness is the administrator’s lack of understanding of what Learning Skills does. They’ve never been here to observe what we do. They have no knowledge base of what Learning Skills does. And when you don’t understand it, $888,000 looks like a lot of money. Even though if you add up the salaries of all our instructors (Susan and Donna are not paid out of our budget), it doesn’t add up to be $888,000. I have no idea where this number is coming
from. Paul Carlson quoted that number.  

- Due to lack of funding, we are all under tremendous stress. I’m teaching 3 classes this semester. When I break between the classes, a crowd of students is following me. They crowd around me when I am out of the classroom. I only have 10 minutes between the classes. On Tuesday, I had students knocking on my classroom door when I was teaching to get to me. I told them it’s totally unacceptable.

- When you don’t stuff a program, you can’t get something for nothing. If they’re not putting money into our program, they are declining the health of our workers. Joyce broke her finger, she has sciatica, and she broke her ankle, and it’s all due to stress. I’ve fallen down the stairs here three times because I’m constantly rushing.

- One of the weaknesses is because we are so underfunded we are under a tremendous stress. My writing class has 73 students in it. When teachers are under stress, they can’t serve the students as effectively.

- Another greatest strength of ours is we work efficiently as a team. We have been working together for so long, that we’ve learned how to work with each other.

- **Faculty**: I’d like to discuss some weaknesses:
  - I’m getting headaches because administration has not given us resources for our adjunct instructors, and it’s a disgrace.
  - Ms. Des Vignes e-mailed the administration and asked them why we can’t get adjuncts, and I’ve asked the same questions to Dr. Todd Scott, but I never got an answer.
  - We are being mistreated by the administration. We are struggling because of the program viability study that should not even have taken place. It’s a disgrace that there’s a program viability study. If they wanted to sit down and chat, it should’ve taken place in the student success committee. There’s no excuse for the program viability committee to be dragged out for so long; it has been 90 days now.
  - The president, vice-president, or the dean, somebody is supposed to listen to our concerns. Somebody is supposed to do something. There’s no other department that’s being as mistreated as the Learning Skills. After the program viability is over, I’m going to ask the administration to do some damage control. A counselor approached me on campus and told me: “I’ve heard you guys are not doing a good job.” “It’s a disgrace. The reason we are struggling is because it should’ve never happened. We are a supplement to the main campus; we are doing a good job. There’s no other department that has been mistreated on this campus as Learning Skills.
  - When I get home, I’m exhausted. I have thousands of students at my desk.
  - What triggered this viability study? Nobody has given me a good reason.
  - People that are serving on this committee should stop and say “Why are we doing this to this department?” If you are considering the score card, then a viability study should be conducted on English/ESL and math departments because they have low score cards. Have you seen the article that our math department is performing the lowest in the nation? Why isn’t there a viability study on them?
  - We have no photocopier, no paper.
  - Our chair person has is in the reading room most of the time; she has no time to attend to her e-mails. It’s a set up for failure.
  - I don’t even want a retirement party because the administration made me feel so unwelcome. They’re questioning my Title V. I wrote a book on Title V. Some of my Title V has been held up since 2012. That makes no sense.
  - One of the administrators doesn’t even use my name. I’m referred to as “she”. That’s an insult to me.
We are going to demand adjuncts; Mary Anne has done all she could; she’s gone to the president, the vice-president, the dean. We had a meeting with them, and Dan Walden told Todd Scott to take care of us, but our adjunct’s hour never got restored. Our dean comes to our department all the time, and it stresses us out; does he go to other departments so frequently? The bottom line is if you are going to come over, have something constructive for us. Like Miriam mentioned, no one can afford to work 3 hours a week.

- **Faculty**: I personally feel what the Viability study is doing is they are asking the wrong questions. My conclusion would be that the structure of the Learning Skills center is excellent; the question really is how does the Learning Skills lead into the English and math flow on campus? What can the Learning Skills do to integrate into the flow of the campus? Then you can ask how the Learning Skills can improve in order to fit into the context of the flow of the campus. The set up here is unique and wonderful, but it does need to fit into the campus flow.

- **Faculty**: That’s exactly what the committee was discussing yesterday at the meeting: Get COMPASS to work with Learning Skills English and math to create pathways from basic skills to college level English and math with the goal to improve degrees, transfers and certificates. This is what we are learning towards as a recommendation.

- **Faculty**: if you are conducting a viability study, it should be transparent; this one seems like it has come out of nowhere. There should be a motive to do it. We have no clue why they are doing this.

- **Faculty**: a program viability studies should be done only if the program is not viable.

- **Faculty**: another weakness is, besides the problem with lack of faculty, you also need classified staff to do the folders and organization. You are working harder because there’re not enough people behind the scenes to do the clerical portion.

- **Faculty**: we are student-oriented department vs. to teacher-oriented. As Robert mentioned, we don’t come in with our own agenda for the student; we look at where the student is and prescribe the appropriate program. The reason why I got upset when they started extending the viability study is because the law is written in such a way that no recourse request can be considered while we are under the viability study. And this means that we are not going to get any adjuncts next year. I only have this month to request my budget, and I will request more adjuncts. I did it last year, but got nothing.

- **Faculty**: There’re 2 departments that they were going to do a program viability study on, and all they simply had to say was we don’t want a program viability study to be done. The two departments are the Dietetics department and English/ESL department. Before the administration would come to us and ask what we needed. I’m talking about Joyce Moore. How’s the administration going to handle the damage control?

- **Faculty**: Todd Scott was here talking to one of our students, asking questions without us knowing that he was there. Last week an ESL student was referred to us that had taken ESL courses for three years, but when he took the placement test, he didn’t show any improvement in 3 years.

- **Faculty**: we’ve embraced that this viability study is being conducted, but I see the impact that the lack of staffing and adequate support is having on every single one of our faculty members. We are not eating, we don’t have the time. Even when we close at 1:00pm, the students still come to us with their questions.

**Adjournment:** 2:20pm