

Academic Assistance Center / Disability Services
Unit Annual Report
2002-2003

Personnel

Ferolyn Angell - Director (100% time, 10 months)
Kathryn Gonier Klopfleisch - Assistant Director (100%, 10 months)
Colleen Frey (75% time, 50% summer)
Jackie Krosch (Temporary & Casual) November - May
Kimeshia Daniels, Dustin Hanson, Lauren Hazenson, Victoria Twumasi-Myarto, Theresa O'Halloran-Johnson - Student Office Support
Kathryn Sullivan - Morris Administrative Intern
63 student tutors, 67 notetakers

Purpose

The Academic Assistance Center & Disability Services unit provides academic support for UMM students to help optimize their learning experience. The general goal of this unit is to help students achieve their academic goals, whatever they may be and in spite of individual circumstances. In its Disability Service capacity, this unit is called upon to consult on all issues pertaining to persons with disabilities.

Academic Assistance Center programs seek to extend the learning environment beyond the classroom. Disability Services ensures that students and staff with disabilities receive the accommodations mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act. By extension, Disability Services also acts in an advocacy capacity for persons with disabilities.

Function

- A. Develop academic support programs for students in consultation with the Academic Dean and appropriate University units (Advising Office, Center for International Programs, Minority Student Program, Residential Life, Student Counseling, The Writing Room, etc.)
- B. Serve students, faculty and staff with disabilities through advising, advocacy, accommodations, adaptive equipment, tutorials, and referrals.
- C. Provide small group or individual, course-specific academic assistance to students through a peer tutoring program.
- D. Provide discipline-specific assistance through the Math Room, General Chemistry Drop-in Service, Computer Science Drop-in hours and Spanish Conversation Hour.

- E. Support non-native English speaking students through individual and group tutorials in English or specific courses.
- F. Provide on-site support via workshops and presentations for special groups (i.e. athletic teams, residence hall floor meetings and Gateway students).
- G. Provide general training in study techniques and learning strategies through the Monday Night Study Table and the Learning to Learn course.
- H. Offer Peer Tutoring in College; a three - five credit course that provides training and experience in the techniques of tutoring.
- I. Participate in orientation and informational activities organized by other campus units.
- J. Promote the use of and provide orientation for the LearningPlus software which allows students to enhance their skills in Math, Algebra, Reading and Writing and to prepare for the PPST exam.
- K. Enhance the professional growth of staff through participation in and contribution to relevant professional organizations and conferences.

Evaluation

The 2002 - 2003 year saw a reduction in the level of participation by students in AAC programs which is directly related to cut backs in Student Internships and work-study funding. However Disability Services activity increased quite dramatically. These two factors caused increased pressure on existing staff that led to hiring a temporary employee to assist the support staff.

The AAC/DS unit has been impacted and perhaps weakened by the continuing erosion of financial and human resources. The core programs have been preserved but most of the activities that were curtailed last year have (Newsletter, Tutor observations, Advisory Committee, etc.) have not been reinstated which, in turn, affects the visibility of our programs.

A new plan for addressing privacy issues for students with disabilities was born midway through the year. This plan involves a major renovation project with the Library to transform the South end of the 3rd floor. Preparations were made for office renovation throughout Spring Semester and construction began immediately after Commencement in May.

Narrative and Statistical

Academic Assistance

Attendance figures in all AAC programs add up to 637 which is an overall reduction from last year. The unique count of students receiving assistance through AAC services was 414 which reflects the fact that students utilizing AAC's services often take advantage of more than one program. Approximately 19% of students using AAC services were students of color, an

increase from last year which closely reflects the total percentage of students of color in the UMM student body. The majority of students (75%) participating in AAC programs were first and second year students.

AAC processed over 400 requests for tutors and organized 157 tutoring groups. These numbers are somewhat lower than last year. Because of the cuts in the work study budget, groups were encouraged to meet only once a week during Fall semester. In contrast, attendance at the Study Table grew this year.

The Math Room had 112 visitors, the Computer Science drop-in service had 9 regular visitors. Chemistry drop-in service was suspended because AAC was not funded for an MAI position in Chemistry this year. The revised format for the Spanish Conversation Hour continued to do well with attendance almost identical to last years (78 total). The Study Table served 106 students, compared to 83 last year.

63 students worked as peer tutors during the year. Eight of the tutors were minority students (13 %). Gonier offered the Peer Tutoring in College course to eight students during the course of the year.

Four sections of Learning to Learn were offered, two during Fall Semester and two during Spring Semester. A total of 38 students took the course. Angell and Gonier presented several workshops on topics related to academic success and study skills during Orientation and participated in the Workshop series organized by Shezwae Fleming for students of color.

Gonier completed her research project with Jeff Ratliff-Crain on the study needs of students in introductory Psychology courses and presented their findings at a "Talking about Teaching" workshop in January at UMM and again at the Academy of Distinguished Teachers in April on the Twin Cities Campus. Gonier also presented the research in an article for the May issue of the Faculty Newsletter at UMM.

At the invitation of three professors, Gonier visited three classrooms to speak to students about specific skills required for the courses. These visits generated some new "recruits" for other AAC programs.

Disability Services

The number of students with disabilities registered for services jumped from 44 to 55 (a 25% increase). These numbers have increased sharply for two years in a row and stretch the limits of the staff to respond. The addition of the temporary staff person in October helped greatly to alleviate the pressure on the front office to respond to student requests. The increase in numbers represents significant staff time to review documentation for incoming students with disabilities.

Angell continued providing consultation and support for staff members with disabilities, a process that involves meeting with Human Resources, Union representatives, and employers as well as the person with the disability.

Gonier worked with the Office of Residential Life to develop a policy for handling requests for single rooms on the basis of disability. She also researched trends in academic success for UMM students with Disabilities.

Students with ADD/ADHD or Learning Disabilities make up 53% of the total population of students registered for services. Students with Mental impairments represent another 27% with a wide range of diagnoses. The remaining 20% are a variety of other disabilities. Only 4 students have either a visual or hearing impairment.

DS provides five main services to students: priority registration, note takers, taped texts, letters to professors and alternative testing. Letters, testing and priority registration are the services most commonly used. In addition 14 students required taped texts. This year DS staff, with some help from volunteers, taped 16 texts, some of them in entirety, that were not available from Recordings for the Blind.

The unit has developed a routine method of ensuring that services are provided in a timely fashion. However there are other individual forms of support (such as consulting with instructors, identifying useful technology or arranging special accommodations) which are very time consuming.

Recommendations and Plans

Take steps to improve the visibility of AAC programs and eliminate any “stigma” students may associate with utilizing assistance.

Increase the Support Staff position to 100% during the academic year.

Continue with hiring additional temporary staff to handle the increase in student traffic and numbers of students and staff with disabilities.

Expand on the experiment of visiting individual classrooms to talk about specific study skills.

Improve the support for tutors with programming in specific areas of concern for the four major types of tutoring – Math, Science, Social Science/Humanities, Language.

Continue to develop a system for “tracking” the academic progress of Students with Disabilities.