Writing Center Operations Consolidated on Second Floor of Marvin Library

Since the beginning of the Spring 2007 semester, in-person writing assistance has been available on the second floor of the Marvin Library.

Previously, writing assistance was available in two locations: Writing Specialist Jim LaBate worked in the Learning Assistance Center on the lower level of the Marvin Library, and Writing Specialist Carol Hammond worked in the computer lab on the upper level of the Marvin Library, assisting students with both writing and computer issues.

The Learning Assistance Center began providing writing assistance in a second location about four years ago as a way to expand services. Traditionally, the writing specialist in the LAC worked with students at a table with pen and paper before the students entered their text on a computer. Adding a writing specialist in a computer lab allowed students who actually composed the computer to receive writing assistance at their computers, as well. Having assistance in two locations, however, became somewhat problematic for both students and staff.

Some students became frustrated when they went to one location only to find out that they needed to go to the other location either because one of the writing specialists was out or was assisting other students and could not provide immediate assistance. In addition, both faculty and staff frequently had to explain to students that writing assistance was available in two different locations but in slightly different formats.

Thus, having both writing specialists in the same location — now known as The Writing Center — should provide more convenient service to all Hudson Valley students. In addition, more students may take advantage of The Writing Center once they realize that so many computers are available for their use.

Students also can obtain help with their writing skills by joining the LAC Online Writing Community. When students log in to the MyHudsonValley Portal and click on Community, they see the Organization Catalog. One of the listings is Student Academic Organizations. If they click on that heading, they are presented with a list of active student academic organizations. Students who click on LAC Online – Writing and the Enroll button are automatically registered for online writing services.

Jim LaBate and Carol Hammond check for student activity throughout the day. Part-time Learning Center writing specialists respond to student activity Monday through Thursday until 10 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Students also may access electronic file cabinets for informational handouts, attach a file for review, request assistance or initiate a chat with the writing specialists or other students (on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 to 8 p.m.).

Students seeking assistance with an assignment or term paper should include the following information: the course name, a thorough description of the assignment and specific questions that they would like the writing specialist to answer. While the writing specialists will not edit or proofread students’ work, they look forward to working with students as they develop and revise their papers.

Thanks to Jim LaBate and Carol Hammond for contributing to this article.

For a tutor’s perspective on the Writing Center, see Lori Critcher’s article on page 2.

Showing Hudson Valley’s Learning Center Spirit (Rah!)

The Learning Centers’ Spirit Day, scheduled for Thursday, April 19, is a day and evening event that celebrates Hudson Valley students who demonstrate excellent personal learning strategies, civility and outstanding enthusiasm.

Each semester, the professional staff in the Learning Centers are asked to nominate students they believe exemplify independent and active learners. From those nominations, one student is chosen by members of the Testing and Retention Offices to receive the Spirit Award, a $25 gift certificate to the Viking’s Cove Bookstore.

Included in the day’s events is a quiz incorporating questions from various disciplines (history, literature, science, math, etc.). The catch is that the answers can’t be found easily through a Google search. Prizes are given to students who correctly answer all the questions. Light refreshments also will be served.

For more information on the Learning Centers’ Spirit Day, please contact Kit Haynes or John Dyson.

Spirit… we’ve got it!
The Writing Center: A Place of Growth

The Writing Center set down new roots at the beginning of this semester on the second floor of the Marvin Library. It hasn’t changed much, though. It still serves as a place of growth; it is much like a garden. We, the tutors and instructors who dwell there, are its gardeners.

Our students, both the young and the not-so-young, all come for the same reason: they come seeking assistance. Some come in with the simplest of needs, such as help with how to document sources using in-text citation, while others come in at a loss as to where to begin their paper or project. We pass on to them the tools we ourselves have acquired over the years. We teach them how to research a topic successfully. We help them to recognize the strengths and the weaknesses in their writing, as well as how to proofread their own papers. We show them how to take a large, overgrown idea and trim it down, or how to take a seedling idea and make it grow.

These are but a few of the things that we do for the students who come to the Writing Center. However, what we do goes beyond that. We serve not only as academic support for our student population, but we also serve as mentors and motivators. We nourish students with encouragement. We feed them with our confidence in their ability to achieve. We give them the tools to cultivate their own success. We are gardeners.

Lori Critcher is a professional tutor and former peer tutor in Hudson Valley Community College’s Writing Center.

Early Warning System Update

Each semester, Hudson Valley’s Early Warning System (EWS) kicks off with Welcome letters from Dr. Carolyn Curtis, vice president for academic affairs. These letters—10,725 in Spring 2007—are accompanied by an academic referral card listing the location, purpose and hours of operation of six of the college’s academic support centers: the Biology Study Center, the Computer Learning Centers, the Dental Hygiene Center, the Language Laboratory, the Learning Assistance Center and the Online LAC.

Two calls from the Student Outreach and Support Call Center are the next steps in the process. Students who have not logged in to their online courses or have been identified by online course instructors because they have not completed the first week’s assignments are reminded of the importance of early and frequent participation. The methods to obtain technical assistance also are reviewed with them. In addition, all new, matriculated students are called; they are welcomed to Hudson Valley and asked whether they have any questions or concerns. Typical questions include withdrawal procedures, financial aid refunds and academic support.

The Early Alert letter process begins soon after these call sessions. Early in the term faculty identify students who exhibit behaviors that are indicative of poor academic performance. This spring, a record number of faculty members (167) identified a record number of students (1,274). The participation rate by faculty topped 30%. The identified students were sent a letter in February, encouraging them to meet with their instructors to discuss the steps necessary to achieve academic success.

The last step in the EWS system is midterm letters, which were mailed this term on Tuesday, March 27. The 2,809 students with GPAs below 2.00 at midterm were sent letters that list action items for increasing their chances for academic success, including invitations to take the Midterm Check Survey, accessible from the Online Learning Assistance Center (olac.hvcc.edu) and the college’s Web home page (www.hvcc.edu), and participate in the Post Midterm Tune-Up workshops conducted by Don Frament, education specialist, in the LAC. In addition, 306 letters were mailed to new, matriculated students with GPAs of 2.00 and higher. Both versions of the Midterm letter explain that the midterm GPA computation used for the letters includes credit-bearing courses and developmental courses. This calculation method reflects the student’s overall performance and highlights the role of developmental courses in achieving academic success. The letter also reminds students that only grades in their credit-bearing courses determine financial aid eligibility.

The Office of Instructional Support Services and Retention is continuing to work with Bette Frisino, director of student services information technology, and Computer Services to prepare an electronic version of the Early Alert system in Banner. Faculty members will be able to identify students who should receive Alert letters throughout most of the semester and specify the reason why a letter is being requested. Before the new system is implemented, the Retention Office will prepare support materials and conduct training sessions for faculty to review the process and procedures.

If you have questions or suggestions regarding Hudson Valley’s Early Warning System, which includes Welcome, Early Alert, and Midterm letters and the SOS Call Center, please contact Kevin McNeelge, retention specialist, by phone at (518) 629-7638 or by e-mail at mcneelge@hvcc.edu.
Retention Reports from Banner

In Spring 2006, the Office of Instructional Support Services and Retention gained access to a number of reports that use information stored in Banner. Bette Frisino, director of student services information technology, and Kathleen Quirk, associate dean of instructional support services and retention, worked with programmers in Computer Services to replicate reports available before Banner was installed.

The Retention Office uses the reports to track retention, identify at-risk populations for further study, support research and provide data to other offices and academic departments. As is true with any data set, each cohort, attribute and condition has an underlying definition that must inform the use and interpretation of the numbers.

SARZLACU – Use of the Learning Assistance Center
Students log in at the reception desk when they enter and leave the Learning Assistance Center. This report summarizes student use of the LAC, including the total number of visits and amount of time spent in the LAC, as well as the unduplicated headcount, by program of study. The count fills in as the academic year progresses, distributed by fall, spring and summer terms.

SARZNCHT – Students who didn’t return
This report counts students from an entering cohort (new and/or transfer) for the term requested who did not return the next semester (up to seven terms after initial enrollment). The results provide data on the number of non-returners, the number of non-returners who graduated, and a distribution based on cumulative GPA (2.00 and above and less than 2.00). The report may be set for any or all major codes and any or all of the 10 sub-cohorts used by SARZRCHT (see below). This report is run in conjunction with SARZRCHT for the entire cohort after the census date. It can be run later in the semester as well, but the report will reflect subsequent attrition.

SARZRCHT – Retention rate
This report counts students who return (new and/or transfer) the next semester, and tracks the term cohort for up to six additional terms. The report displays the cohort distributions for full-time/part-time, midterm GPA (2.00 and above vs. less than 2.00), early alert letter sent, previous credential (high school, GED, 24 credit, conditional or unreported), and admission date (prior to start of semester or first day of classes forward). The report can be requested for any or all major codes and for any or all of the following sub-cohorts: athletes, CASP participant, learning disability, other disability, EOP participant, first generation college student, international student, minority student, MOP participant, and weak in three tested areas. This report is run immediately after the census date for the entering cohort from the previous term and subsequently after each census date. It can be run later in the semester as well, but the report will reflect subsequent attrition.

SARZTEST – Retention of students who test weak in any subject
This report compares the retention of students who do not test weak with those who do for each of the four subject areas of the placement test. Students who test weak in a subject area are divided by whether or not they enrolled in a developmental class in the subject. Students who take a developmental class are further divided based on their final grades in the course. Retention is tracked for one term. This report is run immediately after the census date for the admit cohort from the previous term.

SAUZWEAK – Students who test weak in three subjects
The Testing Office runs this in update mode prior to the census date to set an attribute in the student record to identify those students who tested weak in three subject areas on the placement test. The Retention Office runs this in audit mode to generate mail merge files and telephone lists to contact students or to identify weak-in-three students by major code.

SHRZSATT – Students who stopped attending courses
This report identifies students who stopped attending one or more courses during a term, listing how many courses were dropped out of the total the student enrolled in, and the student’s academic standing. The process also creates a file for labels, letters or phone calls. The summary report charts students in each program of study by courses dropped to courses enrolled. This report is run after final grades are posted for a semester.

SHUZCGPA – Midterm and final grade averages
This process is used for many purposes but by the Retention Office only for midterm GPA calculations. In audit mode, the process creates a report that calculates the midterm GPA for all students and a file that can be used to send Early Warning System letters to the students. In update mode, the process sets the midterm GPA cohort codes for SARZRCHT. The GPA calculator default setting excludes developmental courses; this default is changed to include these courses in the GPA calculation for Retention Office purposes. Both modes are run immediately after the registrar has confirmed that midterm grades are posted.

Offices and academic departments that would like more information on these reports may contact Kathleen Quirk at (518) 629-7255 or quirkkat@hvcc.edu or Kevin McNeellege at (518) 629-7638 or mcneelke@hvcc.edu.

Upcoming Student Outreach and Support Call Center Sessions:

Calls to TAP Decertified Students and Non-Enrolled Spring Applicants: Monday, April 2 and Tuesday, April 3
Continuing Students without Schedules: Monday, April 30 through Thursday, May 4
New Waived Students without Schedules, New Students with Incomplete Applications and New Students Who Missed Their Placement Test Date: Monday, May 7 through Thursday, May 10
### Learning Assistance Center Workshops

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<td>4/9-4/13</td>
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<td>9 a.m. and 10 a.m. APA vs. MLA</td>
<td>2 p.m. and 3 p.m. APA vs. MLA</td>
<td>11 a.m. Preparing for a Final Exam</td>
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<td>Drop in for Got PowerPoint?</td>
<td>12 p.m. Preparing for a Final Exam</td>
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<td>Drop in for Got PowerPoint?</td>
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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON WORKSHOPS, PLEASE VISIT THE LEARNING ASSISTANCE CENTER ON THE LOWER LEVEL OF MARVIN LIBRARY OR WWW.HVCC.EDU/LAC

What are your best practices for retaining students?
Have you learned a new way of engaging students?
Contact Kevin McNeelege at (518) 629-7638 or by e-mail at mcneehke@hvcc.edu to discuss writing or being interviewed for an article for a future issue of Retention PIECES.

### Communications with Accepted Students—A Brief Update

The Communications Gap Committee has been meeting since December 2005 to develop a plan to build and sustain enthusiasm among students who are accepted to Hudson Valley Community College during their senior year in high school. A modified version of the communications plan was implemented for students who were accepted to the College for the Spring 2007 semester, and more than 2,600 Fall 2007 accepted students—and their parents—have been receiving a carefully planned and designed series of letters, booklets, invitations to campus events and e-newsletters emphasizing Hudson Valley’s affordability, transferability, quality instruction and opportunities for student engagement. Members of the campus community who would like further information regarding these communications may contact either of the co-chairs of the committee: Janine Kava, director of communications and marketing, or Kevin McNeelege, retention specialist.

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Teachers open the door. You enter by yourself.  
— Chinese Proverb

The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.  
— Dorothy Parker

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