

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 112 349

CS 002 132

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TITLE A Survey of Learning Program Centers in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education.
PUB DATE Mar 75
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western College Reading Association (8th, Anaheim, California, March 20-22, 1975)
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.76 HC-\$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Developmental Reading; Financial Support; Higher Education; Junior Colleges; *Learning Laboratories; National Surveys; Program Administration; *Reading Programs; Remedial Reading Programs; *Study Skills; *Tutorial Programs; Tutoring; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

A national survey of learning laboratories in institutions of higher education, conducted in 1974, is reported in this document. Questionnaires consisting of 70 items on administration, budget, other programs, facility, staffing, services, clients, hardware and software, and evaluation were sent to all college and university learning centers in the United States. Responses were received from 1,258 of the 3,389 campuses listed in the "Educational Directory." Tables show both the responses to 13 of the questions and the returning institutional variables such as level, student population, name of program center (learning center, learning resource center, reading/writing lab, tutorial program, and other), and type of offering. Survey results show that more than half of the program centers are less than five years old, 85 percent are less than 10 years old, program centers have diversity of functions, and 61 percent of all respondents have program centers. The academic background of program administrators and funding of learning program centers is noted. (MKM)

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A SURVEY OF LEARNING PROGRAM CENTERS IN U.S.
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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The survey is one of the accepted methods for giving definition and continuity to a newly evolving field. Using the survey method, these authors attempted to give definition and continuity to the recent Learning Center movement. The authors' search of the literature for surveys which may have already accomplished this, included, but was not confined to, ERIC, the Minnesota Retrieval System, NRC Yearbooks, WCRA Proceedings, and nationally disseminated education and media periodicals. Over 50 reading program surveys at the state and national level were evidenced in the literature (1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14); however, there were few surveys of study skills programs (2, 4, 5, 15). National surveys of learning program centers were

almost non-existent (11, 12), and no comprehensive national survey of Learning Centers in institutions of higher education was found (3). In order to discern general trends, functions, and purposes, all college and university Learning Centers in the United States were sent questionnaires in the fall of 1974.

Procedure

The survey instrument consisted of 70 items on administration, budget, other programs, facility, staffing, services, clients, hardware/software, and evaluation. After two mailings, one in October and one in December, to the 3,389 campuses of 2,783 institutions listed in the Educational Directory, 1258 responses were received, providing a campus return rate of 38%. Every state was represented in the sample. All information received from the questionnaire was processed by a Control Data Corporation 3150 computer, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and was cross-tabulated according to institutional regional location, level (two-year, four-year, or four-year and above), enrollment, type of offering (liberal arts, professional, or technical), and whether the institution was public or private. In addition, the names of the program centers¹ were categorized and cross-tabulated with the data. The five categories of program center names were as follows: "learning center," "learning resource center," "reading/writing lab," "tutorial program," and "other."

¹The term "program centers" encompasses programs and/or centers.

Results

Since reporting all results would be impossible, items of particular interest have been selected for inclusion in the following tables.² The authors would caution the reader against making any generalizations from data taken out of context of the total survey results.

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentages of returned forms by the different cross-tabulated variables.

Table 1

Returned Forms by Cross-Tabulated Variables

Variables	Responses: Frequency (Percentages)
Regional	
Northeast--Conn., Del., Me., Md., Mass., N.H., N.J., N.Y., Pa., R.I., Vt., Wa. D.C., and W.Va.	342 (27.2)
South--Ala., Ark., Fla., Ga., La., Miss., N.C., Okla., S.C., Tenn., Tex., and Va.	342 (27.2)
Midwest--Ill., Ind., Iowa, Kans., Ky., Mich., Minn., Mo., Nebr., N.D., Ohio, S.D., and Wis.	324 (25.8)
West--Alas., Ariz., Cal., Colo., Hawa., Ida., Mont., Nev., N.M., Oreg., Utah, Wash., and Wyo.	250 (19.9)
Total	1258 (100.1) ³
Public Institutions.	670 (53.3)
Private Institutions	586 (46.7)
Total	1256 (100.0)

²Requests for additional information should be addressed to the authors.

³Percentage totals do not add up to 100% in all cases due to computer round-off error.

⁴The totals for these variables differ slightly because not all the information was available for each campus responding.

Level of Institution	487 (38.8)
Two-Year	352 (28.0)
Four-Year	416 (33.1)
Four-Year and Above	1254 (99.9) ³
Total	
Student Population	483 (38.5)
1-1000	526 (41.9)
1001-5000	129 (10.3)
5001-10,000	80 (6.4)
10,001-20,000	38 (3.0)
over 20,000	1256 ⁴ (100.1) ³
Total	
Name of Program Center	217 (31.0)
Learning Center	43 (6.1)
Learning Resource Center	164 (23.4)
Reading/Writing Lab	11 (1.6)
Tutorial Program	265 (37.9)
Other	700 (100.0)
Total	
Type of Offering	402 (32.0)
Liberal Arts and Teacher Preparatory	124 (10.0)
Professional and Technical	728 (58.0)
Both	1254 ⁴ (100.0)
Total	

Table 2 presents some of the more important questions and responses. These questions have been excerpted from the questionnaire and renumbered.

Table 2
Questions and Responses

Questions	Responses: Frequency (Percentages)
1. Is there a reading/study skills program on your campus?	
A. No, and there are no plans for the establishment of one in the near future (two years).	363 (29.3)
B. No, however there are plans for one becoming operational within two years.	115 (9.3)
C. Yes.	761 (61.4)
Total	1239 (100.0)

2. The program became operational:
- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| A. before 1960. | 69 (9.1) |
| B. 1960 - 1964. | 49 (6.4) |
| C. 1965 - 1969. | 210 (27.6) |
| D. 1970 - 1972. | 261 (34.3) |
| E. 1973 - 1974 | 173 (22.7) |
| Total | 759 (100.1)3 |
3. Most of the financing used to establish the program was obtained from:
- | | |
|--|-------------|
| A. audio-visual department or library. | 30 (4.0) |
| B. departmental funds. | 306 (40.6) |
| C. grant. | 188 (25.0) |
| D. student services. | 97 (12.9) |
| E. other. | 132 (17.5) |
| Total | 753 (100.0) |
4. The department which presently administers program center is:
- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| A. Counseling. | 72 (18.0) |
| B. Education. | 54 (13.5) |
| C. English. | 92 (23.0) |
| D. Library. | 18 (4.5) |
| E. Other. | 164 (41.0) |
| Total | 400 (100.0) |
5. The main program center is housed in:
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| A. Education Department building. | 153 (20.9) |
| B. Library building. | 151 (20.6) |
| C. Student Center building. | 52 (7.1) |
| D. Temporary building. | 47 (6.4) |
| E. Other. | 329 (44.9) |
| Total | 732 (99.9)3 |
6. The program center's administrator earned his highest degree in:
- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| A. Counseling and Guidance. | 124 (16.9) |
| B. Educational Psychology. | 53 (7.2) |
| C. English. | 138 (18.8) |
| D. Reading. | 222 (30.2) |
| E. Other. | 197 (26.8) |
| Total | 734 (99.9)3 |
7. The program center offers academic credit on a regular basis for:
- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| A. none of its clients. | 264 (35.2) |
| B. a few of its clients. | 102 (13.6) |
| C. most of its clients. | 192 (25.6) |
| D. all of its clients. | 191 (25.5) |
| Total | 749 (99.9)3 |
8. Are reading classes taught by the program center?
- | | |
|--|-------------|
| A. No. | 148 (20.1) |
| B. Yes, and they are mostly remedial in nature. | 203 (27.5) |
| C. Yes, and they are mostly developmental in nature. | 387 (52.4) |
| Total | 738 (100.0) |

9. If yes, are these reading classes taken for college credit?	
A. No.	230 (37.5)
B. Yes.	384 (62.5)
Total	614 (100.0)
10. Are study skills classes taught by the program center?	
A. No.	157 (21.3)
B. Yes, but they are not taken for college credit.	283 (38.4)
C. Yes, but they are taken for college credit.	297 (40.3)
Total	737 (100.0)
11. The <u>primary</u> source of referrals to the program center is:	
A. another student's recommendation.	49 (6.8)
B. class held in center.	92 (12.7)
C. counselor and/or faculty recommendation.	422 (58.2)
D. self-referral.	162 (22.3)
Total	725 (100.0)
12. The <u>chief</u> means by which the program center's effectiveness was evaluated last year was:	
A. campus administration evaluation.	98 (14.0)
B. center usage.	181 (25.8)
C. client questionnaires.	179 (25.5)
D. increased mean Grade Point Average of clients or reduced college drop-out rate of clients.	114 (16.3)
E. other.	129 (18.4)
Total	701 (100.0)
13. The program center's permanent staff earned their degrees in:	
A. Counseling and Guidance.	194 (16.1)
B. Educational Psychology.	92 (7.6)
C. English.	321 (26.7)
D. Reading.	370 (30.7)
E. Other.	228 (18.9)
Total	1205 (100.0)

Discussion

The majority (57% or 434) of learning skills program centers in institutions of higher education in the United States becoming operational after 1970 confirms the youthfulness of the Learning Center movement. The fact that more than half of the program centers are less than five years old is consistent with the fact that nearly all (85% or 644) the program centers are less than ten years old.

A perusal of the cross-tabulated data reveals a number of discernable trends. The followings generalizations are derived from the survey data:

- . . . Over one-half (61% or 761) of all respondents reported having program centers. Sixty-nine percent (171) of the respondents from the Western region stated that they had program centers in operation. The lowest percentage of program centers in operation (51% or 171) according to region was recorded for the Northeastern region. Sixty-four percent (217) of the respondents from the Southern region and 63% (202) from the Midwestern region noted having program centers.
- . . . Forty-two percent (86) of the program centers called "learning centers" and 43% (18) of the program centers called "learning resource centers" became operational during 1970-1972; 54% (87) of the program centers called "reading/writing labs" were initiated earlier.
- . . . In two-year colleges, funds used to establish the program center were derived for the most part from the academic departments (44% or 164). In contrast, four-year institutions with post-graduate programs tended to have been established using funds from student services (23% or 55). Four-year colleges and universities showed no significant trend in this area.
- . . . The largest frequency (20% or 19) of program centers called "learning centers" are presently administered by Counseling Departments. Dissimilarly, the largest frequency (30% or 30) of program centers called "reading/writing labs" are administered by English Departments.
- . . . Twenty-five percent (50) of the program centers called "learning centers" and 46% (19) of the program centers called "learning resource centers" are housed in the library. Other categories of program center name showed no significant trends.
- . . . An equal percentage (21% or 43) of "learning center" administrators hold their highest degrees in Counseling and Guidance or English rather than in Educational Psychology (6% or 13) or Reading (19% or 39). Fifty-four percent (82) of "reading/writing lab" administrators hold their highest degrees in Reading. In "learning resource centers," there is a much higher percentage (46% or 19) of administrators with degrees in fields other than Counseling and Guidance, Educational Psychology, English, or Reading.
- . . . Of the institutions responding from the Northeastern region, a much higher percentage (51% or 84) than of institutions from other regions stated that they offered no credit. In comparison, a lower percentage (25% or 42) in the Western region do not give course credit.

- . . . Of those program centers offering credit, "reading/writing labs" tended to offer credit much more frequently (67% or 106) than either "learning centers" (44% or 91) or "learning resource centers" (43% or 17). Close to 60% of those program centers in the South (58% or 123) and West (59% or 99) offer credit to all or most of their clients as opposed to 51% (101) of the centers in the Midwest and 36% (60) in the Northeast.
- . . . Program centers in institutions with post-graduate instruction tended to have clients who were more frequently self-referred (49% or 80) than program centers in two-year colleges (16% or 58) and four-year colleges (19% or 24).
- . . . More program centers (37% or 59) in the Western region tended to be evaluated by center usage than by campus administrators, client questionnaires, increased GPA, or reduced attrition. The other regions displayed no significant trends.

Conclusions

The survey found a tremendous dispersion of information indicating many different kinds of program centers with diversity of functions. The survey bore out the heterogeneity of the Learning Center movement.

Though the survey substantiated the intuitive understandings of many learning facilitators, one finding may surprise some: program characteristics had more statistical significance when correlated by level of institution or program center name than when correlated by region. This demonstrates that regional similarities do not have as much an effect upon program functions as does institutional level and program name.

Further comparative analysis of the Learning Center is necessary to determine how the movement will continue to evolve. For example, will the Learning Center offer more courses for credit and become an academic department or will it continue as an academic support agency? Will the functions of Learning Centers be modified to include instruction in the content fields? Will the Learning Center movement gain continuity or will each program center be totally unique? Future surveys of the type we have conducted could answer many questions raised here about the future of the Learning Center.

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