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*In Memoriam*  
*Dr. Karen B. Quinn*  
*1950-2002*

*Dr. Karen Quinn was the first co-editor of The Learning Assistance Review and served in that position from its inception until 1997. She was extremely involved in the development and implementation of the journal. Karen was committed to excellence and collaborated to make The Learning Assistance Review an exemplary publication. She also served NCLCA as its president from 1992 to 1993.*

*In addition to her professional commitment to NCLCA, Karen was the Assistant Director of the Academic Center for Excellence at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) where she worked for over 22 years. She began her practice as an Academic Skills Specialist in 1979 and was instrumental in building a course-based learning assistance program. Karen worked to improve retention at UIC through her involvement with classes, workshops and university-wide committees to improve orientation, placement and faculty/student interaction.*

*Karen was a personal mentor to many in the field of learning assistance. She earned her Ph.D. in Language, Literacy, and Rhetoric and continued her research throughout her career. She encouraged colleagues in their professional growth and development and continuously supported teaching and research. According to her colleagues at UIC, Karen always had "...a positive attitude and a committed professionalism."*

*We will miss her energy and commitment to excellence, but she will always be remembered as a special colleague.*



## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

To our readers:

This issue starts on a sad note with the memorial to our former editor, Karen Quinn. It is due in large part to Karen's efforts that the journal exists, and we want to be sure and remember her as we continue to produce the quality journal that she envisioned many years ago.

Our first article is from David Arendale, and he discusses the significant role that developmental education has played in higher education throughout history. He "breaks the silence" that is frequently found in historical records where our work is so often ignored. From Arendale's historical perspective, we go to a recent research study done by Hansen, Brothen, and Wambach. They take a systematic look at the effects of early alerts on student outcomes. This is an issue that has been debated over the years, and their study and literature review add to the research base associated with intervention efforts.

The third article was contributed by Jan Norton who reviews the stress levels of learning center managers. Her article discusses the unique concerns related to stress in the learning center as well as the unique opportunities that managers have to alleviate some of the regular stressors. She shares the Job Stress Survey that was used to collect her data.

Wendy Randall invites us to join in a conversation about Robert McCabe's recent publication, "No One to Waste: A Report to Public Decision Makers and Community College Leaders." Randall suggests four components based on McCabe's work that she feels we should be incorporating into our practice to ensure the best opportunities for students to succeed. Please join this conversation on the NCLCA website where the article will be reproduced.

Finally, Valerie Hampson reviews a recently published book, "Learning Together: Peer Tutoring in Higher Education." She recommends it as a useful publication for both the practitioner as well as those interested in the theoretical and research side of peer tutoring. It brings an international perspective to our practice in a very readable format.

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# ARTICLES

## **A MEMORY SOMETIMES IGNORED: THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION**

*By David R. Arendale, General College, University of Minnesota*

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### **Abstract**

Often the history of developmental education is ignored or minimized by many higher education historians. Various reasons are postulated by the author of this article for this occurrence of memory distortion. Acknowledging the role and importance of developmental education presents potentially uncomfortable statements about the historical state of higher education. Most education historians have focused on the traditional topics and histories of the majority White male class and not those of women, students of color, and those of disadvantaged academic and economic background. The silence by some and the near oversight by many education historians concerning the long-term and widespread use of developmental education requires scrutiny.

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### **Overview**

A review of the history of developmental education and learning assistance within the United States provides an intertwined and intimate relationship with postsecondary education. "It can be asserted accurately that bridging the academic preparation gap has been a constant in the history of American higher education and that the controversy surrounding it is an American educational tradition" (Brier, 1984, p. 2). However, there are few comprehensive historical reviews on this subject in the professional literature and when reference is made, it is often only a few sentences or paragraphs over the course of the entire manuscript. A notable exception is Curti and Carstensen (1949) who devoted nearly an entire chapter of their history of the University of Wisconsin to the academic preparatory academy and its relationship with the public high school in the city of Madison.

There are several general historical observations that can be made about developmental education: (a) developmental education is not some phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century, (b) associating developmental education with

a decline in academic standards is false, and (c) developmental education is a factor helping more students to earn higher grades and to complete college.

Some social historians argue that the history of education is primarily a record of the conflict between people who use informal and formal systems of enculturation and education to maintain their economic, social, and political power and of those who use the same processes to improve conditions for all people (Curti, 1959). Most historians state that the transference of culture occurs through both intentional and unconscious mechanisms:

Family, community, and church together accounted for the greater part of the mechanism by which English culture transferred itself across generations. The instruments of deliberate pedagogy, of explicit, literate education, accounted for a smaller, though indispensable, portion of the process. (Bailyn, 1960, pp. 18-19)

While the specific activities and pedagogies that occur within postsecondary institutions have changed since the founding of the country, recurring themes and questions have accompanied each of the major periods. Casazza and Silverman (1996, p. 3) found that three common questions dominated each historical phase of American education, "What is the purpose of postsecondary education? Who should attend college? What should the curriculum look like?" These authors argued that American education slowly evolved as the answers to the questions changed. Casazza and Silverman believed that the continuous tension produced by the elitists and the reformers helped modify the purpose and delivery systems of education over time.

The class conflict articulated by the proponents of these two positions served as the catalyst for continuous experimentation and change within postsecondary education regarding effective practices for academically underprepared students who often composed large segments of the collegiate student body. Elitists laid the responsibility for student academic success with the student rather than the institution. Reformers, according to Casazza and Silverman (1996), were stakeholders from outside postsecondary education who advocated more forcefully for students and their interests. These stakeholders had multiple political agendas and philosophical positions that guided their actions: employers who needed a better educated and trained worker to meet higher demands of the workplace; advocates who believed that postsecondary education was a universal right of all those who lived in a democracy; those from a sociological perspective who saw the need for a diversity of advanced skill preparation required by a more complex society and its increased variety of roles required by society.

### **Historical References to Developmental Education**

A review of the professional literature suggests that some higher education historians have ignored and others have lightly recorded historical events concerning developmental education in American postsecondary education. While there have been numerous articles, dissertations, and monographs published by members of the developmental education and reading education community (Lundell & Higbee, 2002; Stahl & King, 2000), those who write broad histories of higher education in America generally provide little attention to this area and the students who are involved.

A review of this component of higher education suggests that many students throughout American history have been involved with different academic activities related to developmental education and learning assistance (e.g., academic tutoring, enrollment in remedial courses, participation in learning assistance centers). At times developmental education programs involved nearly half the number of students enrolled in official graduation-credit bearing college-level courses. Sometimes the number in developmental education exceeded the college-level group. The lines become blurred as students simultaneously take courses at both levels of instruction.

Colleges in the early 1800s found that the majority of their students were underprepared for the obvious reason that public education was nonexistent in most of the U.S., therefore rendering the college applicants lacking in basic skills and knowledge (Craig, 1997; Ross, 1942). For enrollment management reasons, many colleges during the mid to late 1880s were forced to recruit large numbers of young and unprepared students that generated needed student tuition to try and avert institutional closings due to financial pressures (Rudy, 1996). One of the best documented early historical accounts of developmental education was at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Continuing a pattern since the institution was established nearly two decades before, only 41 of the 331 admitted students in 1865 were enrolled in college-level courses. The rest were enrolled in the academic preparatory academy located in the local high school (Curti & Carstensen, 1949). Nationwide, it was estimated in 1894 that 40 percent of all first-year students were enrolled in college preparatory courses (Ignash, 1997). This is similar to the rate recorded in 1991 when it was 33 percent (NCES, 1991).

In the 1800s, even prestigious institutions such as Harvard University found that nearly all students, including those from privileged family backgrounds, were underprepared (Garrison, 1892; Goodwin, 1895; Hill, 1885). The admissions quality of students at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia improved some by 1907 when only half the students failed their college entrance exam (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

The widespread academic underpreparation of students prompted an institutional response by most colleges to offer various forms of developmental education for their students. Canfield (1889) found that nearly 80 percent of colleges in the mid-1880s provided some version of a college preparatory program. This rate has remained stable for approximately 100 years (Maxwell, 1979; Roueche & Snow, 1977). As

academic access has continued to be broadened throughout American history, more students have enrolled in postsecondary education than have successfully completed college-bound coursework while enrolled in high school (Boylan, 1999). This inequality between academic preparation and academic aspiration nearly guarantees the continual need for developmental education programs at the collegiate level.

Most of the previous references to developmental education programs in American colleges cited in this article were based on passages of several sentences to several paragraphs in texts that averaged 400 pages. While there might have been a passing comment about the underprepared nature of the students, other classic higher education histories had no mention of developmental education programs that served them (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Butter, 1900; Butts & Cremin, 1953; Valentine, 1946).

A common pattern for most historical accounts of American higher education has been to focus on administrative policies, governance issues, campus facilities, activities of the white male college presidents and the governing boards. Actually, there is little discussion of the students enrolled at the institutions. Generally the only issues that surface about students concern social life and student discipline. In many ways, the college students were invisible participants of the higher education enterprise.

### **Memory Distortion**

A possible explanation for this treatment of developmental education is provided by Kammen (1997). He describes the issue of “historical amnesia.” Kammen quotes Ralph Ellison on this subject:

Perhaps this is why we possess two basic versions of American history: one which is written and as neatly stylized as ancient myth, the other unwritten and as chaotic and full of contradictions, changes of pace, and surprises as life itself. (Ellison in Kammen, 1997, p. 164)

Kammen stated that beginning in the 1980s historians began to develop a literature that focused on the role of “collective memory” with the historical record of culture in America. He found that distortions of memory occurred for a variety of reasons, not just for cynical or manipulative motives (Kammen, 1997, pp. 199-200). Kammen then engaged in a long discussion concerning the similarities and differences between the “heritage phenomenon” and true history:

The heritage syndrome, if I may call it that, almost seems to be a predictable but certainly nonconspiratorial response—an impulse to remember what is attractive or flattering and to ignore all the rest. Heritage is comprised of those aspects of history that we cherished and affirm. As an alternative to history, heritage accentuates the positive but

sifts away what is problematic. One consequence is that the very pervasiveness of heritage as a phenomenon produces a beguiling sense of serenity about the well-being of history. . . . (Kammen, 1997, p. 220)

Another perspective on this issue of memory distortion is offered by Thelen (1990) who describes the difficulty of accurate renderings of history, “The challenge of history is to recover the past and introduce it to the present. It is the same challenge that confronts memory” (p. vii). The recovery process involves many choices by the historian regarding selection of materials that may be in contradiction with other historical records and therefore subjects the process to the potential biases of the researcher. Historians who specialize in this area of study generally cite the Civil War as the most celebrated event of memory distortion. Frederick Douglass attributed the failure of the Civil Rights Cases of 1875 to memory distortion just a decade after the end of the war. “The historical memory of any transforming or controversial event emerges from cultural and political competition, from the choice to confront the past and to debate and manipulate its meaning” (Blight, 1990, p. 30).

### **The Difficult Truths of Developmental Education History**

There are several potential reasons why developmental education occupies an uneven, and generally invisible, place in American education history. Some writers may have ignored it since primary source material was not available due to the colleges not retaining it. Others may have overlooked this aspect since as college students themselves they had not accessed developmental education and learning assistance services and were generally unfamiliar with them, or they did not value them in comparison with other elements of the college experience. Another potential cause may have been that it was a high priority or unconscious decision to focus on traditional topics and histories of the majority White male class and not those of women, students of color, and those of disadvantaged academic and economic backgrounds. It also may have been due to the discomfort by some historians about the potential impact of its existence upon the institution of higher education since it suggests that colleges and universities were not effectively meeting the needs of their students.

Acknowledging the role and importance of developmental education presents potentially uncomfortable statements about the historical state of higher education: academic bridge programs were necessary to help students adjust to a college environment for which few were prepared; student populations other than White privileged males often needed academic support systems to increase their chances for success since they came from disadvantaged backgrounds; the need for developmental education indicts the efficacy and effectiveness of elementary and secondary education; considerable sums of scarce financial resources and assignments of personnel were diverted from research and other scholarly purposes to provide academic development for underprepared students; and finally, that many

students who dropped out of college and could have been retained through an effective developmental education program, instead left without ever achieving their immediate academic goals and obtaining credentials that may have been critical to achieving life goals.

Handler and Gable (1997) explore the inclusion of accurate social history into the record as interpreted at historic sites and museums. They studied Colonial Williamsburg and the attempt by the contemporary managers of the historical enterprise to be more inclusive of previously excluded people and other social history topics such as slavery and treatment of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. To announce the intent to change the way that history was portrayed at the site, the managers at Colonial Williamsburg decided to symbolically introduce some disorder into the environment to increase the authenticity of the experience by more accurately reproducing reality:

Road apples. There is no more evocative symbol for the current state of American history museums than the horse droppings that decorate the neat street of Colonial Williamsburg—America’s premier outdoor history museum. Manure is authentic dirt, an instance and symbol of nature disorder . . . . The manure represents the coming of the new social history . . . . The museum would continue to celebrate American identity and American community, but it would no longer be silent about past injustices and their ramifications in the present. In short, the past that social history introduced into the museum was to be a dirtier past, both literally and metaphorically. (Handler & Gable, 1997, pp. 3-4)

The analysis by Handler and Gable (1997) provides an uncomfortable analogy for a detailed examination of the history of developmental education. Adapting their analogy, developmental education can be seen as part of the “dirtier past” of American higher education. Frequent participants in developmental education have been previously excluded from the history of higher education (e.g., African-Americans, women, and people from lower socioeconomic, first-generation college, and academically-disadvantaged backgrounds.) Handler and Gable faulted Colonial Williamsburg for still continuing its “impression management” (1997, p. 31). The researchers stated that critical history has yet to be fully embraced at the institution. “Mimetic realism, the reigning historiographical philosophy at Colonial Williamsburg, destroys history” (1997, p. 224). The researchers implored that less energy should be placed on reproducing historically accurate door knobs and more attention spent on the role of previously excluded people.

Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) in their national survey of Americans found that most perceived themselves to be deeply involved in history and preferred to “encounter” it rather than only relying upon interpretation of historical events by scholars who might be “creating their own truths” (pp.32, 102). These encounters occurred through family discussions, genealogical research, looking/taking photographs, historical

movies or television shows, museums and historical sites, historically-related hobbies, or historical organizations. Direct participation was preferred to reading scholarly publications. Most wanted to connect with the history and bring personal meaning to themselves. "Respondents [to the survey] interrogated the past as they addressed the present" (p. 67).

Developmental education was not "encountered" by most historians who chronicled postsecondary education in America. Much of the history focused on White male administrators, governing boards, campus facilities, faculty members, and school policies rather than on the student body and its encounter with the academic world. Students were too often the invisible members of the higher education community.

### Conclusion

Rather than aggressively telling the whole story, uncomfortable as that might be, Handler and Gable (1997) believed that the educational managers at Williamsburg had focused too often on accurate portrayals of superficial trappings of history and not on sufficient substance. The researchers stated that accurate history would aggressively investigate race and class conflict topics and also assure that they correctly adorned buildings with appropriate time period physical artifacts. The same could be claimed of some historians of American higher education concerning developmental education. How could the involvement by so many students over such a long period be virtually ignored by many historians? While it is dangerous to ascertain the silent motives of others, developmental education presents a sometimes uncomfortable facet of postsecondary education that warrants further investigation and study. The whole study of American higher education requires a deeper examination of developmental education and the students who were involved and benefitted.

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# **AN EVALUATION OF EARLY ALERTS IN A PSI GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY COURSE**

*By Gretchen Hansen, Bethel College, and Thomas Brothen  
and Cathrine Wambach, General College, University of Minnesota*

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## **Abstract**

Enhanced computer technology and the Internet hold great promise for improving the effectiveness of academic advising and interventions for at-risk students. Early alerts are one such strategy, but there have been few systematic attempts to investigate alerts when technology is used to deliver them, particularly where teaching professionals play a role. In this article, we review literature on technology applied to early interventions and report results from a study that compared instructor and advising staff effects on the impact of early alerts. The results cast doubt on early alerts as an effective tool to improve the performance of at-risk students.

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## **Introduction**

Programs called “intrusive academic advising” are designed to track student academic progress closely and identify where assistance is needed early in the term so as to improve performance and retention (Garing, 1993). Crucial to such programs are early alerts and mid-semester grade reports in which students not making adequate academic progress in classes are referred to advising and other college services. The two assumptions behind these interventions are that students may be unaware of their status in the course or may not know where to go for assistance with problems. By providing feedback on performance and information on resources to students, colleges hope to improve retention and student success. Several systems that make use of computerized databases to report performance information to students and advisors have appeared in the literature.

McKinney (1997) described the system at Florida Community College where instructors complete scanable progress reports for each student midway through the semester from which intervention strategies are recommended. No information regarding student outcomes was available for this program. A similar method is used at Miami Dade Community College in Florida where an academic alert system provides students with information about their progress midway through the semester with reports gathered from faculty. This system generates individualized letters to be sent to students and forwarded to counselors for use in advising. McKinney compared students who did and did not receive letters and showed that those who did receive them had slightly higher term grade point averages (GPA; 2.32 and 2.28



respectively). A similar computerized advising network that involves an early alert notification about absences and an academic progress mailing has been used at East Central Community College in Mississippi. However, a systemic review of the results has yet to be reported (Jeffcoat, 1991).

At Portland Community College in Oregon, a computerized database allows advisors to use transcript data and information about course offerings to help students plan their schedules. In a pilot test, 100 volunteers were assigned to either a test or control group. The test subjects had a block put on their registration requiring them to meet with their advisor before they could enroll. Preliminary results after one semester showed no differences between the groups for GPA, number of credit hours completed, and appropriateness of courses taken (McKinney, 1997).

At Midlands Technical College in South Carolina, students and counselors create an educational plan and after the first meeting, students are not required to see their advisors again unless they fail to maintain satisfactory progress. In addition, similar to Florida Community College and Miami Dade Community College, the computerized database is used to generate letters referring students to college services that match their academic needs, such as tutoring and workshops. An examination of student retention after three years showed an overall improvement of 7%, and targeted at-risk populations (underprepared students, undeclared majors, and minority students) experienced even greater increases. In addition, the use of student support services increased by 10% (McKinney, 1997).

Rudmann (1992) completed what is probably the most comprehensive study investigating early alert systems at Irvine Valley Community College in California. Irvine Valley's system is designed to help first-term freshmen having trouble in their classes. For two years, researchers compared the academic outcomes of 300 students randomly assigned to one of three groups: an "early alert" group that received a letter describing alerts and campus resources available to help; a "see advisor" group that got a letter directing them to meet with their advisor regarding alerts and to discuss success strategies; and a control group. The outcome measures were cumulative GPA, course pass rate, grade points earned, and college retention after two semesters. Nearly half the students at Irvine Valley received one or more alerts. Compared to students receiving alerts, students without alerts had a significantly higher GPA and course pass rate. However, none of the outcome measures differed significantly among all students in the two treatment groups and control group.

Rudmann (1992) reached some important conclusions worth considering when implementing an early alert system. One was that a letter to students, if well designed, might be the best approach. Also, since instructors are the primary source of information about student progress, faculty should be highly involved in the design of the early alert process. Rudmann also concluded that early alert students should be tracked so the college can determine the rate at which they report to services, follow-

up on those who fail to report, and determine if the support services really are helping students.

Despite the conclusion that instructors should be highly involved in the design of the early alert process, instructors in the studies reported above generally played only limited roles in systematic "intrusive advising." Even if the teaching staff did play a role in the interventions, it was usually to complete a "bubble form" giving general information about academic progress and attendance which, in turn, might be used to generate individualized reports for their students.

## Background

In our general psychology course we have many reasons to be more intrusive. The class enrolls about 240 students each semester and includes students with diverse academic preparation. For example, last semester our students included an elderly Russian immigrant, a woman with a degree in Spanish who decided to pursue a second degree, a football player on probation, and several students with disabilities. Students' American College Testing composite (ACT) scores ranged from 12 to 29. To accommodate the broad range of learners we enroll, we use Keller's (1968) personalized system of instruction (PSI) that we have augmented with written and computer based activities (Brothen & Wambach, 2000). Students read the text, complete the study guide, and then use a variety of computerized practice exercises to get feedback on their mastery of the material. When they are ready, they take chapter quizzes. Students can complete the practice exercises in our computer classroom or over the Internet from anywhere they have access to a computer. The chapter quizzes must be completed in the classroom which gives us an opportunity to work with students individually as they learn psychology. There are no lectures in the course and only the study guide assignments have firm due dates.

There are many advantages to this pedagogy (Brothen & Wambach, 2000), especially for underprepared students. Students get a great deal of feedback and personal attention, and the flexibility of the structure accommodates a wide variety of personal situations. However, it does open possibilities for some students to postpone their work and for others to avoid anxiety arousing activities such as quizzes. This can become very problematic for students late in the semester when they are trying to catch up on the large volume of material that must be mastered in any general psychology course.

There are many reasons why a student might be having trouble in a general psychology course, some of which can be exacerbated by the PSI method. Some students struggle with procrastination, some experience test anxiety, some have learning disabilities that make reading the text and test items more challenging, and others have multiple personal problems that interfere with academic progress (Brothen & Wambach, 1999). When a student is attending class, but not performing well on exams, we work individually with that student but usually do not contact the

academic advisor. During the semester in which we conducted this study, when students began falling behind in the scheduled coursework and not attending class, we started a proactive process of sending “early alerts” to the advisor and the student, or just the student, and tracking the outcomes. Our purpose in this study was to determine whether we could “turn around” students making poor progress in the course with alerts and also to determine the benefits of involving the advising staff in this process.

The current system in the General College of the University of Minnesota has instructors submit alerts to advisors who then contact students and urge them to meet with their instructors to deal with the progress issues. At the beginning of the semester, all instructors are given class lists that include the name of the student's academic advisor. Instructors are encouraged to report students who fail to attend the first day, have persistent attendance problems, perform poorly on assignments or tests, or exhibit other behaviors that interfere with success. The reports can be either paper-and-pencil or electronic (email) and are sent to both the student and the advisor. At the middle of the semester, instructors provide detailed information about all students' grades to advisors and students. The mid-semester information is used to plan course selection for the next term and make decisions about withdrawing from courses. Because the mid-semester grade information comes to advisors and students fairly late in the term, the early alerts have the greatest potential to result in changes in student behavior. Also, because alerts are only given to students who are displaying problematic behavior, they are less likely to overwhelm advisors with information, thus making it more likely that advisors will have time to focus on these at-risk students. We were interested in seeing whether contacting advisors “added” anything to our actions or whether our data would be consistent with Rudmann's (1992) conclusion that advisors did not provide added value in these kinds of situations.

### Method

In weeks two, three, and four of the 15 week semester, we identified students who were falling behind in their coursework and who also were not attending class regularly. Each time alerts were sent to this group, we randomly assigned half of the students getting the alert for the first time to the group receiving both student and advisor e-mail academic alerts and assigned the other half to the group receiving only student alerts. Students remained in their assigned groups. At the end of the semester, there were 20 students in the “advisor/student” group, and 20 students in the “student only” group. The students who received the fewest alerts received one alert, and the students who received the most alerts received three. As a comparison group, we randomly selected twenty students who completed the course but did not receive academic alerts. We did not create a “wait, control” group that received no intervention because we felt it would be unethical to ignore some faltering students. Thus, all poor progress students were in our experimental groups.

We sent the e-mail alerts to students' preferred e-mail addresses. The alerts indicated the students were falling behind and had not been attending class, and they needed to spend some significant time in the classroom or consider withdrawing from the class. We asked the students to reply to the alert via email and also for the advisors who received copies of the alerts to reply by informing us as to what they had done to contact their advisees. This request for a reply is standard college procedure and reflects how alerts are typically sent.

All students in the class had signed informed consent forms allowing us to gather relevant data on their academic history and course performance and to report it anonymously. We gathered several pieces of data relevant to student progress from the University records office: students' high school percentile rank (HSPR), ACT score, and current college GPA. Our course software kept day-to-day records of student progress in our course. We compiled this data as well as whether they passed the course.

### Results and Discussion

First, we checked to see whether the groups differed initially. Mean college GPA prior to the semester for all students in the study was 2.75 ( $SD = 1.20$ ) with no significant differences between the groups. Similarly, the mean overall ACT score was 21.18 ( $SD = 3.74$ ) with no significant differences. But the groups did differ in HSPR ( $F 2, 54 = 7.94, p < .01$ ). The “student/advisor” group ( $M = 41.45, SD = 17.17$ ) and the “student only” group ( $M = 51.61, SD = 13.52$ ) did not differ from each other ( $p = .208$ ) but the “student/advisor” group differed from the control group ( $M = 64.29, SD = 20.94$ ) according to a Scheffe post-hoc contrast ( $p < .01$ ) and the “student only” group differed marginally from the control group ( $p = .108$ ). These differences suggest not an academic ability difference between our alert students and our control group students but a long-standing problem with academic progress.

Second, we checked to see whether our three groups differed at the end of the semester in total points and rate of passing the course. The groups differed significantly on total points earned ( $F 2, 57 = 22.66, p < .001$ ). The “student/advisor” group ( $M = 112.35, SD = 108.66$ ) and the “student only” group ( $M = 152.85, SD = 108.96$ ) did not differ from each other according to a Scheffe post-hoc contrast ( $p = .423$ ), but both differed from the control group ( $M = 314.11, SD = 62.51$ ; both  $p$ 's  $< .001$ ). Similarly, 5 of 20 students in the “student/advisor” group passed the course and 10 of 20 in the “student only” group passed. They did not differ by Kruskal-Wallis test for proportions passing the course but did differ significantly from the control students, all of whom passed (all  $p$ 's  $< .001$ ). These differences show that for most students in the alert groups, poor early performance carried over to their final course outcomes.

Third, we examined the evidence that the alerts were making a difference. One might first ask if students got the alerts. College policy is for advisors to reply to instructors when sent alerts. Of the 20 we sent to advisors we received 9 replies. In addition, 6

students from that group replied to us via e-mail. We received no e-mail replies from the “student only” group students. Whether students replied, however, was not related to our measures of course success. We expected replies from the “student/advisor” group students because this is supposed to be a major advisor activity, but we were concerned that we received no replies from the “student only” group students. Most students check their e-mail regularly but some do not. In any case, we had reason to doubt that some students in both groups even got our alerts. This further questions the viability of this type of alert system because in the “real world” busy advisors and teachers don’t have time to keep following up to see that alerts were received.

We looked at several pieces of data to determine if the alerts were making a difference. For example, number of alerts sent to students correlated negatively with their total points  $\textcircled{r} = -.494, p = .001$ ) and passing the course  $\textcircled{r} = -.380, p = .015$ ). This, of course, indicates that more alerts went out to the right students—those in trouble, but it doesn’t indicate that alerts were a positive influence. We similarly found no evidence that sending more alerts improved student performance. Because so few (3) third alerts went out we compared the means for total points of the 20 students who received 1 alert ( $M = 184.10, SD = 104.17$ ) with the 17 who got 2 alerts ( $M = 90.18, SD = 94.75$ ). The difference was significant ( $t = 2.85, p < .01$ ). It was clear from this data that more alerts did not improve performance.

We also examined data that might indicate if it made a difference when students got the alerts, very early or somewhat later in the semester. We correlated the week students got their first alert with total points. The *later* they got the alert the more total points they earned  $\textcircled{r} = .363, p = .020$ ). This result gives no support for the utility of an early alert but did indicate the likelihood that students getting the alert later simply had been working earlier and had fallen off only temporarily.

If the alerts accomplish anything, it should be to induce students to increase their course work output. Therefore, we examined whether the alerts had an immediate effect on student work. We counted the number of exercises completed in the week following the sending of the alert (week 3 after the week 2 alert, etc.) to see if students did more work immediately after getting an alert. We found no significant differences in student work in the week after alerts were sent. Similarly, the amount of work by all the groups did not differ from the first to the second half of the course. T-tests for related measures yielded probability values all greater than .16. There is no evidence in our data that the alerts produced any obvious effect on student work or course performance.

## Conclusions

The early alerts did not seem to produce a turnaround in student behaviors or contribute to ultimate success in the course for the students who received them. This suggests that student patterns of work may depend more on longstanding habits such

as procrastination (Brothen & Bazzare, 1999; Wambach & Brothen, 2001) or personal problems (Brothen & Wambach, 1999) than intervention strategies such as early alerts. While some students who received alerts eventually passed the course, we found no evidence that their improvement was related to sending them an alert. We also found no evidence that advisors' involvement in the process had a positive impact. In fact, although not statistically significant, the “student/advisor” group ultimately did *less* work than the “student only” group. If this difference turns out to be reliable in future research, student resistance to pressure might explain it. It could be possible that getting everyone involved might cause students to “run” from the situation. Conversely, students whose advisor is not involved can “quietly” return to work without causing too much fuss.

Of course, some might argue that if even one in twenty students turns around because of the alert, it is worth doing. Perhaps alerts perform a useful function for some students. If so, our data suggests that notice from the course instructor works just as well as getting the advisor involved.

There is at least one benefit to having advisor involvement. The process provides an opportunity to make notations in the files of heedless students that instructors and advisors tried to turn around with no good effect. Overall, however, there is no evidence from this study that the alerts had an independent and useful effect on students' success in our course. Our experience suggests that developmental educators should do further research on student experience getting and utilizing alerts to determine whether it is wise to expend too many resources on early alert intervention programs.

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As measured by the Job Stress Survey (Spielberger & Vagg, 1999), workplace stress among learning center managers is comparable to stress levels experienced by other academic employees and managers. Although experience and education have little effect on learning center managers’ perceptions of stress, there appear to be some differences between male and female responses to stressors. Learning center professionals have several unique concerns related to job stress, but they have unique opportunities as well to alleviate stress for themselves and their employees by both claiming and sharing control over workplace environments and policies.

## Introduction

We tend to talk about stress in general terms, yet we can all identify specific events, circumstances, and even people that create stress in our lives. Certainly, we recognize that events in our lives are not equally stressful; while waking up to an alarm clock is minimally stressful for most people, losing a job or a loved one is assuredly more stressful. In addition to the wide range of stressors in our lives, there is a wide range of responses to any given event or circumstance. People simply experience stress in different ways. It may be cliché to point out that one person’s stress is another person’s challenge, but the cliché is true: a first day on the job may be one person’s excited opportunity while it may be another person’s dreaded obligation. And, we can’t consistently identify any one event as stressful; the copier breakdown on Tuesday can be taken in stride if the day is, overall, going well, but its breakdown right before a critical deadline has the potential to evoke a significant stress response.

Identifying stressors, assessing their severity, and analyzing responses are complex tasks, but because “stress in the workplace is a serious threat to individual well-being and ultimately to organizational survival” (Sutherland & Cooper, 1988, p. 32), there are notable advantages to tackling these tasks. Stressful work situations decrease the pleasure we might otherwise experience at work; workplace stress needs to be examined in order to understand and reduce it.

The primary goal of this study is to identify key sources of, and reactions to, workplace stress among learning center managers and to explore briefly some means for decreasing stress.

## Review of the Literature

Although there is a large body of research related to workplace stress, there has been relatively little focus on academic positions. Sutherland and Cooper (1988) provide a good overview of work stress, including organizational and environmental factors, interactions between potential stressors and personality types, and different kinds of stress. Berwick (1992) identifies job satisfaction as the most significant reducer of work-related stress, but also notes several key stressors in higher education: “shrinking budgets, limited career mobility, role overload, and role ambiguity” (p. 11).

# JOB STRESS AMONG LEARNING CENTER MANAGERS

By Jan Norton, Missouri Western State College

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## Abstract

When stress researchers do turn their attention toward academe, they generally focus on faculty. In "The Faculty at Risk," Schuster and Bowen (1985) offer four propositions about the increase in stress and the decline of morale among faculty. They cite, in particular, the change in focus from effective teaching to competition for jobs and an emphasis on research. In a front-page article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, McMillen (1987) cites a 1984 study which found that over 60% of faculty are stressed. She lists the primary causes of stress for faculty members as "classes to teach, papers to grade, grant applications to write, committee work to complete, students to advise, and books and articles to write and publish" (p. 1). Although the focus was faculty, the activities are familiar to many learning center directors. *Coping With Faculty Stress* (Seldin, 1987) provides several additional perspectives on the causes of stress within academe and presents possible intervention strategies.

Learning centers are clearly focused on teaching and learning, but not all learning center managers are considered faculty, and even those who are may spend a significant amount of time in an administrative role. Blackburn, Horowitz, Edington, and Kloss (1986) note that many similarities exist between faculty and administrators (e.g., income, education, comparable environmental pressures), although "administrators reported fewer stress-related problems than the faculty" (p. 38). The researchers also note that "for administrators, there is a significant association between job strain and their satisfaction with their supervisor. Such an association does not exist for faculty" (p. 38).

Several studies note, however, that faculty and administrators are more similar than different in their experiences of stress. Indeed, Horowitz, Blackburn, Edington, and Kloss (1988) did not separate out academic administrators in their study of faculty because "many were still active as scholars and teachers and would not qualify as a distinct subculture" (p. 30). Another study concluded that there were "no significant differences between the responses of faculty and student affairs staff members" (Brown et al., 1986, p. 106). The results also did not show differences in reports of stress or strain among faculty in different disciplines. Gmelch and Burns (1994) found similarities between faculty and administrators on stressors related to time and task (e.g., meetings, interruptions, too heavy workload). For both groups, the least amount of stress was associated with reward and recognition (Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Horowitz et al., 1988). Smith and Sulsky (1995) studied 160 faculty, administrators, and support staff at a Canadian community college, finding that time pressure was the most frequently cited stressor among the participants.

Given the dual role many learning center directors hold, responsible for both student learning and departmental administration, it is worth noting that one model of studying job strain places both teachers and managers in the same general category. Karasek and Theorell (1990) identify four quadrants of job categories based on the level of decision latitude (i.e., control) and psychological demands. In this schema, teachers and managers are identified as having "active" positions with high decision

latitude and high psychological demands. In this quadrant, decision-making is itself somewhat stressful though the authors argue that for most managers, "constraints on decision-making, not decision making per se" (p. 44) are a more significant source of stress. A study of female university faculty and administrators (Amatea & Fong, 1991) also notes the "significant relationship between lower perceived control and greater levels of strain" (p. 428). Radmacher and Sheridan (1995) generally support the job strain categories and stress assessments of Karasek and Theorell although Radmacher and Sheridan caution that specific workplaces, not just job categories, are significant factors in stress. They cite as examples the teachers in their study in which inner city teachers reported more stress than those in the suburbs.

In addition to examining different job roles and categories, researchers have studied whether gender, age, and job experience have an impact on workplace stress. Brown et al. (1986) note that "studies of gender difference in stress have yielded mixed results" (p. 100), even as they found that women reported experiencing more stress and strain than did the men in their study of faculty members and student affairs staff. Gadzella, Ginther, Tomcala, and Bryant (1990) found women's mean scores were higher on all scales they used to measure stress. However, Amatea and Fong (1991) studied female faculty, administrators, and researchers and found results similar to studies of male subjects. Decker and Borgen (1993) studied college employees and found no statistically significant effects for gender. Gmelch and Burns (1994) note "findings related to gender and age have not been consistent in the research" (p. 81).

Spielberger and Reheiser (1994) examined differences between male and female responses in a study of corporate and university settings. They found similar overall stress levels in men and women: "both men and women rated the same 6 items as highest in perceived severity [inadequate salary and lack of opportunity for advancement were the two most severe], and that both sexes rated the same 5 items as lowest in severity" (p. 209). However, they also noted several events that were more stressful for women (e.g., meeting deadlines, periods of inactivity, changes from boring to demanding activities) and generally conclude that there are important gender-related differences for particular events, even if means overall are very similar for both males and females.

When examining stress experiences related to age and job experience, researchers "conventionally believe that stress universally declines with chronological age" (Gmelch & Burns, 1994, p. 88) but speculate that experience or tenure in a position is more relevant than age per se. Gadzella et al. (1990) would agree; after finding that younger participants reported more stress, the researchers speculated that older, more experienced workers have learned to cope and mastered the ability to delegate. In her study of student affairs administrators, Berwick (1992) found that higher years in the profession, higher levels of education, smaller institution size, and being male were all associated with lower stress scores. However, Decker and Borgen (1993) found that "the control variables gender, age, tenure, and education were at best minimally

related to the outcomes of strain and satisfaction” (p. 474), and Lease (1999) found neither gender nor experience made a difference in the measurement of stress.

Thus, the only factor in current research which has been clearly associated with stress on the job is the level of decision-making power given to the employee: as control increases, stress decreases. Research about other causes of workplace stress have yielded mixed results. Studies examining gender, age, job experience, and education have not been able to identify a consistent relationship between these factors and academic employees' experience of stress, and studies for academic employees have not included specific attention to learning assistance professionals.

## **Methodology**

Given the questions that exist in the current research about workplace stress, the purpose of this study was to (a) identify the sources of stress among learning center managers; (b) study the extent to which variables such as age, gender, and job experience affect learning center managers' perceptions of stress; (c) explore stress-related concerns introduced by this population; and (d) propose some relevant strategies for coping with and reducing the stress experienced by learning center managers.

### **Instruments**

The Job Stress Survey (JSS) (Spielberger & Vagg, 1999, JSS) assesses events and workplace conditions that may be considered stressful. The untimed test presents 30 different job-related events (e.g., “dealing with crisis situations,” “noisy work area,” “meeting deadlines,” “excessive paperwork”). The first item, “assignment of disagreeable duties,” is rated 5; participants rate the other 29 items on a scale of 1 to 9, depending upon the extent to which the item is more or less stressful than being assigned disagreeable duties. The same 30 items are presented again, but in the second ranking, participants use a 0 to 9+ scale as a frequency indicator (i.e., “Number of days on which the event occurred during the past 6 months”) (p. 3). In addition to providing overall scores, two subscales measure job pressure and lack of organizational support. The JSS also requests information about the participant's age, gender, and level of education.

In an additional short questionnaire prepared by the author, participants were asked to record the years of experience they have as learning center managers and the number of years they have held their current position. Participants were also asked to record their perception of job stress levels in the past 5 to 10 years and their predictions of job stress in the future; for both items, participants indicated whether they believed the level of job stress has increased, decreased, or stayed the same. Space was provided for comments about specific JSS items or the topic in general.

### **Process and Participants**

During the Spring 2000 semester, a total of 60 people (9 men, 51 women) completed the survey. Fourteen selected participants filled out the survey during on-site visits to their learning centers; the remaining 46 participants volunteered after hearing about the study on LRNASST, an email listserv designed for learning assistance professionals, or through the Learning Assistance Center Management Special Interest Group of the College Reading and Learning Association. Community colleges and four-year schools in the United States and Canada are represented. The learning center managers all supervised more than one type of service (e.g., not just Supplemental Instruction [SI] or only peer mentoring) and more than one discipline (e.g., not just a writing center or a math-only lab). The participants have had from 1 to 26 years of learning center management experience (mean: 10 years) and from 1 to 22 years in their current positions (mean: 7 years). Participant ages ranged from 28 to 68 (mean: 48 years old). About 73% are working with a master's degree with only 20% having earned a doctorate.

## **Results**

Score interpretations are not available in the JSS Professional Manual specifically for educators; university faculty and administrators are included in the JSS Managerial/Professional (M/P) group, so those scoring tables were used to analyze test results for this study (Spielberger & Vagg, 1999, JSS Professional Manual). There are no statistically significant differences between the scores of selected and self-selected participants.

### **Past and Future Stress**

Participants noted whether stress in the past 10 years had decreased (1), remained the same (2), or increased (3); they were also asked to predict future levels of stress in the profession using the same descriptors. For both the past and future ratings, the mean score was 2.7, indicating a general consensus that stress had been increasing and would continue to do so. Participants' gender, age, and years of experience did not correlate with their assessments of past or future stress. Only one statistically significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) existed between the level of education and the assessment of past stress: participants with earned doctorates tended to rate past stress higher than did the participants with master's and bachelor's degrees.

### **Source and Frequency of Stress: Job Stress Survey Scores**

The JSS provides an overall assessment of job stress, including the perceived severity of stressor events and the frequency with which the stressors occur. Table 1 summarizes the responses of learning assistance professionals, showing severity and frequency mean scores and standard deviations for the 30 items in the JSS.

Of the 30 JSS items, the four most severe stressors and mean scores for learning assistance professionals were (a) “inadequate support by supervisor” (Item 6, mean: 6.50); (b) “lack of participation in policy-making decisions” (Item 18, mean: 6.42); (c) “fellow workers not doing their job” (Item 5, mean: 6.40); and (d) “insufficient personnel to handle an assignment” (Item 15, mean: 6.35). The least amount of stress is caused by periods of inactivity (mean = 2.83).

**Table 1. Learning Assistance Managers’ Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Job Stress Survey Items**

JSS Items	Severity of Stress		Frequency of Stress	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1. Assignment of disagreeable duties	5.03	.26	4.69	2.59
2. Working overtime	4.80	1.94	7.12	3.01
3. Lack advancement opportunities*	5.07	2.14	3.51	4.14
4. New/unfamiliar duties*	4.55	1.97	5.32	2.97
5. Fellow workers not doing their job	6.40	1.84	4.88	3.31
6. Inadequate support by supervisor	6.50	2.37	3.30	3.43
7. Dealing with crisis situations	6.03	1.77	5.60	3.05
8. Lack of recognition for good work	5.57	1.81	3.70	3.52
9. Perform tasks not in job description*	4.23	2.07	6.45	3.16
10. Inadequate/poor equipment*	4.98	1.88	4.32	3.64
11. Increased responsibility*	5.03	1.99	5.16	3.16
12. Periods of inactivity	2.83	1.96	1.75	2.56
13. Difficulty with supervisors*	6.05	2.68	1.97	2.88
14. Negative attitudes toward organization*	5.68	2.05	4.63	3.28
15. Insufficient personnel*	6.35	1.92	5.72	3.37
16. Critical on-the-spot decisions*	4.80	1.95	6.48	2.76
17. Insult from customer/colleague*	5.50	2.30	2.42	2.30
18. Lack participation in decisions*	6.42	2.09	4.18	3.22
19. Inadequate salary	5.43	2.25	4.14	4.09
20. Competition for advancement	3.58	1.87	.86	1.97
21. Poor or inadequate supervision	4.58	2.19	2.84	3.36

JSS Items	Severity of Stress		Frequency of Stress	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
22. Noisy work area	3.68	1.94	5.02	3.79
23. Frequent interruptions	4.85	2.09	8.52	1.62
24. Boring to demanding activities*	3.53	2.00	6.38	3.30
25. Excessive paperwork	5.35	2.21	6.02	3.32
26. Meeting deadlines	4.80	1.90	6.93	2.60
27. Insufficient personal time*	4.45	2.47	5.05	4.18
28. Covering work for others*	4.67	2.10	5.18	3.52
29. Poorly motivated coworkers	5.81	2.42	4.57	3.75
30. Conflicts with other departments	5.76	2.31	3.22	3.08

\* Item has been paraphrased to save space

The three most frequent stress events for learning center managers are (a) “frequent interruptions” (Item 23, mean: 8.52); (b) “working overtime” (Item 2, mean: 7.12); and (c) “meeting deadlines” (Item 26, mean: 6.93). All other items were rated below 6.5. The least frequent cause of stress for learning center managers was “competition for advancement” (rated a mere .86). For all but one item (16), the range of frequencies was 0 to 9: when asked about “making critical on-the-spot decisions,” the lowest score circled was 2. Apparently, no one is immune to that necessity.

The stress frequency rankings by learning center managers are similar to the rankings within the M/P sample used to develop the JSS norms. Interruptions and deadlines are among the top three most frequent stressors in the M/P group, as they are for learning center managers. In terms of stress severity, the test developers identify “lack of opportunity for advancement” and “inadequate salary” as among the top four most severe M/P stressors, but neither item appears in the highest ranked stressors among learning center managers. “Inadequate support by supervisor” is ranked in the M/P top four as it is in the learning center managers' top four, but “lack of participation in policy-making decisions,” identified as a top-four concern for learning center professionals, is ranked ninth by the M/P group.

The JSS has an index score as well which considers both severity and frequency of the stress experienced. According to that index, the top five most significant stressors for learning center managers are (a) “frequent interruptions,” (b) “insufficient personnel to handle an assignment,” (c) “excessive paperwork,” (d) “working overtime,” and (e) “dealing with crisis situations.” The lowest-rated index items were “competition for advancement” and “periods of inactivity.” “Frequent interruptions,”

“insufficient personnel,” and “excessive paperwork” were also among the five highest ranked stressors within the M/P norm group, and the lowest two items for learning center managers were also within the bottom five ranking among the M/P group.

Two subscales focus on job pressure (JP) and lack of organizational support (LS). Job pressure items (4, 7, 9, 11, 16, 23-27) “reflect stressful aspects of the job’s structure, design, or duties” (Spielberger & Vagg, 1999, *JSS Manual*, p. 6) and lack of organizational support items (3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, 18, 21, 29) “reflect events involving other people [i.e., difficulties with supervisory personnel or fellow workers] or organizational policies or procedures, rather than specific aspects of the job itself” (Spielberger & Vagg, 1999, *JSS Manual*, p. 6). The top three most severe stressors for learning center managers (i.e., “inadequate support by supervisor”, “lack of participation in policy-making decisions”, and “fellow workers not doing their job”) are all related to a lack of organizational support. Two of the three most frequent stressors (“frequent interruptions” and “meeting deadlines”) are related to job pressure, as are “excessive paperwork” and “dealing with crisis situations.”

The *JSS* results place learning center administrators within the 50<sup>th</sup> to 75<sup>th</sup> percentile range suggesting that learning assistance managers experience only slightly more stress than the average managerial and professional employee. Table 2 presents learning center managers' overall and subscale scores for perceived severity of the stressors, the frequency with which these stressors occur, and the index scores which incorporate both severity and frequency. According to Spielberger & Vagg (1999, *JSS Manual*), percentile ranks at or above 75 can be used as a cut-off score to identify highly stressed workers.

**Table 2. Mean Scores and Percentiles for Job Stress, Job Pressure, and Lack of Organizational Support**

		Mean	Percentile
Job Stress	Severity	5.08	50 <sup>th</sup>
	Frequency	4.67	70-75 <sup>th</sup>
	Index	26.14	70-75 <sup>th</sup>
Job Pressure	Severity	4.77	55-60 <sup>th</sup>
	Frequency	6.20	75 <sup>th</sup>
	Index	31.12	75 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of Organizational Support	Severity	5.71	55 <sup>th</sup>
	Frequency	3.80	65 <sup>th</sup>
	Index	24.96	65-70 <sup>th</sup>

## Source and Frequency of Stress: Questionnaire Comments

Many participants wrote freely about their experiences with workplace stress and their general perceptions of their positions. One woman who has held her current position for six years wrote, “I don’t mind having a demanding job—but I wish it were okay, more okay to be a human being too. I fear that meeting the demands of this job, striving too hard to meet the demands of this job will necessarily put my health and my relationships at risk. It’s ironic because part of my responsibility is developing programs to help students balance their lives—be good students and good people.” Another learning center manager with 16 years of experience makes sure her stress levels are fairly low: “I believe that I must have a good relationship to the university and a good fit between my values and the university’s mission and objectives—or I should leave.”

A few people responded specifically to *JSS* items. Regarding Item 6, “Inadequate support by supervisor,” one participant wrote, “people see me as competent and as doing good work, and a few close work friends are affirming. What I’d love, however, are some personal words from my supervisors and from staff I supervise. Lack of complaint is not the same thing.” Another described the problem she had answering Item 3: “Questions relating to ‘advancement’ and ‘competition’ are difficult to answer in the LC environment. Turnover is rare and new staff is generally brought in from the ‘outside.’”

The comments overall suggest five stressors that were not covered in the *JSS* items. The most frequently noted of these is the pressure that technology represents. As one respondent described the situation, “Learning assistance professionals must now also be technology coordinators—often not our field! To continue to provide services (online writing labs, online tutoring, etc.) we must become technology experts in addition to learning assistance professionals.” Another respondent noted the mistaken perception that technology somehow makes work easier, when in fact it often places even more demands on limited space, staff, and budgets.

A second stressor was budget issues. Although not covered within the 30 *JSS* items, budgets and funding sources were clearly a concern for many participants who commented they are frequently asked to “do more with less.” Competition within institutions and with other institutions for grant funding represents a noteworthy source of stress for several managers. One female director who has held her current position for three years explained her frustration with the budgeting process overall: “We are given all kinds of opportunity for input, but most often it’s discounted or disregarded. That’s the stressful part: pretending we’re a team while working in a hierarchy where money is the bottom line.”

A third area of specific concern was the stress of working with students who have disabilities. Several people reported confusion about laws and common practices for providing services, and more than one person noted that working with the



administration or parents of students can be more stressful than finding appropriate accommodations and assisting the students themselves.

A related fourth stressor involves student preparedness and attitudes: “Our administration thinks we will admit more [and] more better prepared students, but the opposite keeps happening,” wrote one director who has worked eight years in her current position. A veteran of 19 years wrote that “students are more demanding and less realistic about what it means to be a college student and the commitment that should go along with it.” Others suggested that the problem may lie in the overall culture, in which “feeling good and quick fixes” rather than sound practices cause stress in the people who genuinely believe in the value of the education they offer to students.

Lastly, a few respondents believed that some of the stress in the profession comes from an identity crisis of sorts. Wrote one administrator with ten years of experience, “We’re still fighting with academia for legitimacy as a field. We don’t have enough student involvement in national organizations to develop that or begin to create some stability.” While one administrator with 16 years of experience commented on “a lack of unity among professionals,” another was more concerned about whether learning assistance centers are “perceived as integral parts of an institution or peripheral.”

It is equally important to note that despite the stressors, an additional theme emerged from the questionnaires: namely, that many learning center managers love their jobs. As one female manager wrote, “While my job is stressful and I would like to be better compensated for all my efforts, there are concomitant rewards for doing this kind of work.” Wrote another with 19 years of experience, “I truly enjoy what I do and consider myself lucky to have been in a job that I enjoy so much. It’s the constant contact with students, most of [whom] appreciate what you do for them. In spite of all the difficulties, I have always tried to keep a positive attitude and that has helped get through some of the tough times.” Several who report that their stress is minimal note that their budgets are acceptably healthy, they have the amount and quality of space they need, their staff members are positive and competent, and they feel supported by the faculty, administration, and students.

### **Effects of Experience, Education Level, and Gender**

Age, years of experience in management, and level of education did not have an impact on the overall responses given by participants. Individual item responses, however, do reflect a few patterns. T-tests indicated that statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) according to education level occurred for responses to only one item, “performing tasks not in job description.” The mean scores for participants (bachelor’s degree, 1.75; master’s, 4.35; doctorate, 4.58) indicate an increasing perception of stress associated with duties outside of the job description. Years of experience in learning center management seemed to have a main effect ( $p < .01$ ) with only one item as well, “inadequate salary.” Those participants with the least

amount of experience had a mean score of 6.26 while those with the most years of management experience had a mean score of only .50 indicating increasing satisfaction with salary as years of experience increase.

Effects of gender seem to be present although with so few male participants ( $N = 9$ ), any conclusions must be seen as tentative. Table 3 identifies JSS severity, frequency, and index scores which yielded statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between male and female responses.

**Table 3. Mean Scores for Males (M) and Females (F) on Selected JSS Items**

<u>JSS</u> Items	<u>Stress Severity</u>		<u>Stress Frequency</u>		<u>Index Scores</u>	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
2. Working overtime			5.1 1	7.47		
4. New/Unfamiliar duties			3.0 0	5.73	13.0 0	25.1 8
5. Fellow workers not doing their job	4.78	6.69	2.5 6	5.29	15.7 8	37.9 2
7. Dealing with crisis situations	4.89	6.24	3.5 6	5.96	17.1 1	37.9 6
9. Perform tasks not in job description			3.3 3	7.00		
10. Inadequate/poor equipment			2.1 1	4.71		
11. Increased responsibility			2.8 8	5.52	12.2 5	29.5 8
15. Insufficient personnel			1.6 7	6.43	9.22	44.2 2
27. Insufficient personal time	2.56	4.78	2.2 2	5.55	6.89	32.6 7

### **Discussion**

Results of this study confirm much of the earlier research about workplace stress and suggest that learning center managers respond to stress in many ways that are comparable to other professionals. This study identified problems with a supervisor as the most severe stressor for learning center managers, a result comparable to the study done by Blackburn et al. (1986), who also noted the significance of stress generated by unsatisfactory relationships between administrators and their supervisors. Scores at or below the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for participants in this study would

seem to confirm Karasek and Theorall (1990) who placed teachers and managers in a comparatively low-stress quadrant. Although the number of male participants is very small, this analysis of workplace stress suggests that there may be higher levels of stress among females, as have some earlier studies (Brown et al., 1986; Gadzella et al., 1990; Spielberger & Reheiser, 1994), even as it acknowledges that men's and women's experiences are more similar than they are different.

The results also point to a few distinctive ways in which learning center managers respond to or identify stressors. As powerful as the Job Stress Survey could be to help learning center employees assess their individual and collective concerns, the instrument does not capture some of the unique duties or spirit of the profession. Learning center managers are stressed about keeping up with and effectively using technology, understanding the complexities of providing services to students with disabilities, and balancing the dual roles of teacher and administrator. Many participants noted that some stressors are beyond control or influence, such as state budget cuts and students' lack of preparedness; consequently, those factors which can be affected are especially important to address. For example, the comments provided by learning center managers suggest they need to allocate time for training and research in order to keep up with educational technology so they can select and use it effectively. If relationships with supervisors are stressful, those relationships may also require additional time and attention in order to improve communications and clarify or prioritize responsibilities. There is assuredly no one solution to dealing with workplace stress in learning centers although it is clear that effective programs must consider not only the employees but also the interactions between the employees and their workplace environment and policies (Crandall & Perrewé, 1995). And, as Radmacher and Sheridan (1995) warn, one must consider the uniqueness of each individual and workplace in order to understand and address the stressors that exist there.

However, given that one of the significant stressors reported by learning center managers is the lack of supervisor support, and given the positive impact that decision latitude has on reducing stress (Amatea & Fong, 1991; Horowitz et al, 1988; Karasek & Theorall, 1990; MacLennan, 1992), it would indeed seem that learning center managers could reduce overall workplace stress by providing support as a supervisor and sharing decision-making with their employees. Ganster (1988) identifies seven different work functions that provide opportunities for exercising control: work tasks, work pacing, work scheduling, physical environment, decision-making, other people (supervision, training), and mobility (leave job, move on). MacLennan (1992) agrees that improving the workplace may be a better response to stress than training individuals in coping strategies and stress tolerance. She believes stress reduction programs should focus on three areas: altering the working environment (e.g., light, noise, air quality), improving organizational and managerial issues (e.g., clarifying functions, examining benefits and salaries, providing staff development opportunities), and enhancing interpersonal relationships and

organizational climate (e.g., supervisor and peer relationships, occupation prestige, eliminating harassment and discrimination).

Paradoxically, directors can exercise their control over the learning center in order to establish an environment which shares control. Such a win-win solution to workplace stress is precisely what Karasek & Theorall (1990) might recommend: "In view of the fact that the vast majority of workers might be better off with more decision opportunity and at least some executives would be better off with fewer stressful decisions, the implication of these dual findings is that both executives and workers would be better off with a more nearly equaled sharing of decision power" (p. 44). By both exercising control and sharing decision-making with employees, learning center managers can have a positive impact on workplace stress, improving their own experiences and circumstances while simultaneously improving the workplace for their employees.

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## JOIN THE CONVERSATION

### **REFLECTIONS ON NO ONE TO WASTE: A REPORT TO PUBLIC DECISION MAKERS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS**

*By Wendy Randall, National-Louis University*

The title of Robert McCabe's study immediately grabs the reader's attention. If there is truly "no one to waste", then several things need to be done by educators and learning institutions to ensure that students have the best possible opportunities to succeed.

First, we need to help students meet the academic requirements of our learning institutions by assessing their areas of strength and weakness and empowering them to make the appropriate decisions relative to their goals and objectives. Also, we must become aware of any obstacles that might hinder students from meeting academic requirements. For example, some students face severe financial hardships and need to be guided towards available financial resources. Other students are dealing with overwhelming personal issues. In these types of situations, students are in need of our assistance. Such assistance is possibly beyond our scope. However, we can do our best to refer students to the appropriate resource(s) and work to secure the necessary assistance.

Second, we must be willing to work with students on a regular and continuing basis. In other words, we must be patient and realize that some students will succeed and others will need to choose another path. However our consistent support and encouragement of these students in their efforts to be successful is invaluable. Therefore, whether students persist or withdraw, we will have hopefully made them realize that there is "no one to waste": every student is important.

Third, educators need to discuss frankly their willingness to support and encourage students. For some educators, overwhelmed by having to work with too many students or deal with numerous administrative issues, their willingness to do the aforementioned is based primarily on scheduling. For other educators, the issue is personal and they determine on an individual basis how far they are willing to go in their efforts to assist students. Still other educators view all students as having at least some potential and work with them accordingly.

### **Library Subscription for *The Learning Assistance Review***

**The Learning Assistance Review is a publication of the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA). It is published twice a year, in the fall and spring.**

**The journal seeks to expand and disseminate knowledge about learning centers and to foster communication among learning center professionals. Its audience includes learning center administrators, teaching staff, and tutors as well as other faculty and administrators across the curriculum who are interested in improving the learning skills of postsecondary students.**

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Fourth, in order to effectively support and encourage students, educators need to be aware of programs and assistance available to students on their campuses. When students enter the postsecondary learning environment, they need to be made immediately aware of the following: (1) academic standing, (2) financial aid, and (3) remedial assistance. “The quality of college programs can be maintained only if remedial services are provided. Access and remedial education are inseparable” (McCabe, p.7).

McCabe strongly advocates access to remedial or developmental education. When developmental (under prepared) students enter college, they deserve a chance to move forward with their goals. For some students, goals are achieved and, for others, goals remain unobtainable. However, students need to at least have the opportunity to succeed.

Educators can help to make the difference. Educators have opportunities to inform students. Therefore, whether or not educators are in advising roles, they should be willing to assume advising roles in order to make sure that every student is informed, always remembering that there is no one to waste.

Students need the intervention of very committed educators and learning institutions. As previously mentioned, students face many obstacles. McCabe asserts that minority and poor students in particular face even greater obstacles. Note the following statement: “Poor children begin their lives with every conceivable disadvantage: poor parental care, lack of early education, inadequate healthcare and unstimulating household environments. One result is lower learning achievement when compared with children from higher income families” (McCabe, p.13). Therefore, when dealing with underprepared students, the educator must be aware of the aforementioned factors. For example, a student might be very concerned that he/she cannot measure up to the academic standards of a college math course. However, if the student is barely surviving and coping with many other issues, then perhaps the student is not able to deal effectively with the academic problems. Frankly, a student who is struggling just to survive will be more concerned with survival than by the fact that he/she lacks basic reading skills (for example). According to McCabe, this type of student is “...simply...not on an even playing field” (McCabe, p.13).

Every student entering the university or college is important. Successful students need to be supported, and encouraged as do struggling students. The latter need even more support and encouragement. In short, as educators continue to work with students, they need to remember that there is indeed, “no one to waste”.

McCabe, R. H. (2000). No one to waste: A report to public decision-makers and community college leaders. Washington, D.C.: Community College Press

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## Reference

# BOOK REVIEW

## ***LEARNING TOGETHER: PEER TUTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION***

*Reviewed By Valerie White Hampson, Sandhills Community College*

Falchikov, N. (2001). Learning together: Peer tutoring in higher education. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Learning Together: Peer Tutoring in Higher Education by Nancy Falchikov is a comprehensive survey of peer tutoring. Peer tutoring is defined in its widest sense as students coming together for the purpose of learning, and the book covers all aspects of student interdependence from dyads to cooperative groups. The subject of cooperative learning is discussed through the contributions of educators from Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Great Britain, giving the reader the benefit of an international perspective. Various forms of peer tutoring are defined, and each form is illustrated by appropriate learning activities. These learning situations include suggestions for cooperative groups, tutors, and mentors. The book also contains useful information on creating and evaluating tutoring programs as well as a discussion of the benefits and difficulties associated with such programs. A rationale for using technology in collaborative activities is presented. The practice of peer tutoring is related to theories of student and adolescent development and relevant research is reviewed. Anyone interested in cooperative learning practices will find in this book a wealth of practical advice firmly grounded in theory.

The book is well organized and the clearly labeled sections within each chapter make it very easy to find information. The many tables and charts included in the book summarize the material and provide the reader with quick references. In the preface, Falchikov suggests two routes for the reader to follow. The practical route is for those readers interested in how to set up and organize peer tutoring activities, and the process route is for those who wish to examine the topic through theory and research. Both routes begin in chapters one and two. Their paths then diverge and come back together for chapters ten and eleven.

Falchikov divides peer tutoring into four categories: same level peer tutoring, where the participants have equal status; same level peer tutoring where unequal status is introduced by the coordinator; cross level peer tutoring, and cross level peer tutoring involving two institutions. Each of these categories of peer tutoring is supported by

suggestions for learning activities in the form of “How to do” boxes. These boxes contain objectives linked to an activity, a section explaining the organization of the activity, and its expected outcomes and applications.

The practical route, following chapters one and two, continues with chapters five through nine. Organizers, or administrators, of learning centers might well choose this route, which describes the creation, development, and evaluation procedures of a tutoring program. In this section there is an article by Sinclair Goodlad of Imperial College London. Goodlad suggests seven rules for tutoring and mentoring programs which, if not followed, may lead to failure. This section also looks at some obstacles encountered by initiators of tutoring programs and offers suggestions that may help to allay fears and promote cooperative learning through workshops and staff development activities. Problems associated with tutoring such as motivation, absenteeism from tutoring sessions, and students’ dislike of group work are addressed. A contribution from Richard Felder and Rebecca Brent of North Carolina State University looks at issues centering on the organization of groups. Anyone who has tried to organize cooperative learning groups in a classroom will find this contribution extremely helpful.

The importance of tutor training is stressed, and the reader is provided with an outline of available training methods and techniques. Contained in this section are tools for assessing tutoring skills and tutor styles along with examples of workshop activities, progress reports, and tutoring logs. Since students may be reluctant to participate in cooperative learning activities, several ways of promoting interdependence among students are presented. An important first step is to communicate the benefits of cooperative learning, but Falchikov also suggests that students should be rewarded for their participation in group activities. Strategies for managing conflict and dealing with disruptive tutee behaviors are discussed. The seven styles of disruptive behavior described by Roberts are presented, and techniques for coping with each of these are explained. Handbooks, manuals, and other training materials are referenced.

As Falchikov points out, program evaluation has several benefits. Discovering what is working, or not working, in a particular program is very useful. If a program evaluation indicates beneficial outcomes, funding may be secured more easily, and others might be encouraged to try cooperative methods. Program evaluation involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of research. A brief outline of each of these methodologies is provided and samples of different assessment tools are outlined. Choosing an appropriate method of evaluation is very important, and Falchikov provides insights on how to make such decisions. A very useful table links program objectives to suitable evaluation procedures. Falchikov, recognizing that program evaluation can be time consuming, suggests keeping the hypothesis simple and using a straightforward measuring instrument. The increased understanding of a program provided by evaluation makes the effort worthwhile.

The practical route also includes a chapter by Nil Tomes, from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, in which he presents the ways technology can shape communication and extend collaboration. The limitations and benefits of using technology are discussed. A model of the learning cycle defined by Mayes, Coventry, Thompson, and Mason is included to illustrate the rationale for using technology to promote cooperative learning practices. Tomes discusses the advantages and disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous communication. At the end of this chapter is a list of useful web site addresses.

The process route provides the reader with extensive coverage of theory and research and relates theory to the practice. Classroom instructors, interested in implementing cooperative learning practices into their own classroom, might well choose this pathway through the book. This route takes the reader through chapters one and two and chapters three and four. The reader can then go either straight to chapters nine and ten, or join the practical route at chapter five. The many cooperative learning activities discussed provide a teacher with the opportunity to reflect on the different activities in relation to the needs of a particular class or group of students. The instructor also benefits from the integration of learning theory with various activities. This linkage of learning theory and learning activities enables an instructor to choose an activity based on a related educational aim.

Falchikov uses her background in psychology to present peer tutoring within a framework of theory. The familiar cognitive development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky are outlined, but Falchikov also introduces ideas from role, reactance, and attrition theories. This gives the educator a different perspective from which to view student interaction. The valuable insights that Falchikov provides enable the reader to understand the different reactions and attitudes of students to various tutoring situations. Such an understanding enables more informed organization of student pairings or groupings.

The book, at times, has a distinctly British tone and includes some references to education in Britain. Practitioners in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States have also contributed articles which gives the book international validity and makes it a useful guide for educators anywhere. In several of these articles, contributors to the book share their experiences with peer tutoring allowing others involved in its practice to reflect on the difficulties as well as the advantages of different schemes.

The book is so full of relevant material, practical advice, useful examples, and interesting perspectives that it is difficult to imagine that anyone interested in cooperative learning would not find something in this book to interest them. Falchikov provides information on a wide variety of fields and merges them together under the umbrella of peer tutoring. The subjects covered range from research techniques to theories from cognitive development and social psychology. It gives

practical advice to those wishing to implement any form of co-operative learning activity, but it also situates those activities firmly in theory. Perhaps the most unique feature of the book is its international approach, which links educators to a global community. Consideration of educational practices from different geographic perspectives reassures the reader that the problems and questions faced in a local classroom, or learning center, are the same problems and questions facing all educators wherever they are located.

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*Valerie White Hampson, is a math instructor, Sandhills Community College in Sandhills, North Carolina.*

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## PUBLICATION GUIDELINES

As an official publication of the National College Learning Center Association, The Learning Assistance Review seeks to expand and disseminate knowledge about learning centers and to foster communication among learning center professionals. Its audience includes learning center administrators, teaching staff and tutors, as well as other faculty and administrators across the curriculum who are interested in improving the learning skills of post-secondary students.

The journal publishes scholarly articles and reviews that address issues of interest to a broad range of learning center professionals. Primary consideration will be given to articles about program design and evaluation, classroom-based research, the application of theory and research to practice, innovative teaching strategies, student assessment, and other topics that bridge gaps within our diverse discipline.

1. Prepare a manuscript that is approximately 12 to 15 pages in length and includes an introduction, bibliography, and subheadings throughout the text.
2. Include an abstract of 100 words or less that clearly describes the focus of your paper and summarizes its contents.
3. Type the text with double spacing and number the pages. Follow APA style (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th edition, 2001).
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You will receive a letter of acknowledgment that your manuscript has been received. The review process will then take approximately three to six weeks at which time you will receive further notification related to your work. If your manuscript is accepted for publication, a computer disk or e-mail transmission will be requested.

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The mission of the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA) is to support learning assistance professionals as they develop and maintain learning centers, programs, and services to enhance student learning at the postsecondary level.

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x

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