Message from the Dean

As you can see from the articles encompassed in our Fall, 2014 newsletter, the Academic Success Center continues to support thousands of students in a variety of initiatives with a wide range of outstanding campus partners. Numbers of students have nearly doubled in the use of our rapidly expanding College of Engineering Tutoring Lab, and the Lied Library has expanded tutoring spaces on the second floor in order to help accommodate the hundreds of students seeking help with a range of disciplines, primarily Math and the Sciences. In partnership with a wide range of departments and faculty, our Supplemental Instruction (SI) program has nearly tripled in size, and SI sessions are being offered to full capacity in such areas as Economics, Biology and Chemistry. These efforts, along with advising, academic success coaching, First-Year Seminars with our good partners in the College of Liberal Arts and support of our student-athletes in concert with Athletics, have added up to over a 90% retention rate of students who use ASC services. As we look ahead to ways of expanding and always improving our support, the ASC is developing both a Winter Bridge program and an expansion of Summer and Fall Bridge Programs.

Full Circle: A Familiar Face in a New Position

Oftentimes, people have meaningful transitions, and I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to speak to my journey in the Academic Success Center.

As many people are aware, I was an Academic Success Coach for the 2010-2011 academic year. What few people know is that the experience of being a Coach was a game changer for me. I developed as a professional and started to consider a career in Higher Education as an option. I gained mentors and colleagues that I still trust and cherish today. After graduating with my M.Ed. in School Counseling, I worked with K-12 students as an Educational Advising Coordinator and Counselor, but something was missing. I missed working at a university, at UNLV, and in the Academic Success Center.

Fortunately, I still kept in touch with my mentors in the ASC, and when a position as an Academic Advisor became available, they encouraged me to apply. So, I applied and worked in that position for more than 2 years before transitioning into my new role as Coaching Coordinator/Academic Advisor. Now, I get to use my skills as a previous coach and advisor to help continue to build upon the momentum of the Coaching Program while coordinating services.

What is already happening?

Since starting on October 1st, the Coaching team has already implemented pilot group coaching to serve more of our students efficiently. We are starting a Mentor-A-Coach program where advisors from the various advising centers on campus will build relationships with our Graduate Assistants and information will be shared between the two programs. As of October 17th, we already have volunteers from 8 out of 9 academic colleges. We have also hired two new coaches!
What is to come?

I am so privileged to have joined a team of passionate and hard-working graduate students that truly care about student development. Not only are they invested in their students’ growth and success, they are also very dedicated to the development of the program and themselves. We are looking to work more closely with Admissions to streamline the process for all students who are conditionally admitted and admitted through the appeals process. We are looking to create a more resourceful way to serve students through expanding group coaching. Additionally, we are working on expanding the Academic Success Series by partnering with other units. And much more!

Can you believe they almost did not hire me as a Coach? I trust that everything happens for a reason, and I was placed in the ASC in 2010 to serve students and staff with the talents I have been given.

Supplemental Instruction

The Academic Success Center provides several programs to help students further their academic careers, grant them assistance with their classes, and provide strategies to create healthy and positive collegiate experiences. The Supplemental Instruction (SI) program is one of the programs which allows students to make positive progress within the classroom by enriching their understanding of content and concepts.

The SI program has experienced tremendous growth over the past few semesters, and our SI leadership staff- Chyna Miller, Tutoring/SI Coordinator; Samantha Grider, SI GA; Elle House, SI Front Desk Manager; and Kristina Mejia, Learning Support AA- are currently working to develop the program even further. We have current partnerships with the Economics department, as well as some instructors within the Chemistry, Computer Engineering, Life Sciences, Management, and Physics departments, in order to enhance students’ understanding of complex material.

Our SI Leaders as required to hold SI sessions twice a week, as well as one office hour per week to accommodate any students that are unable to attend the normally scheduled sessions. During the regularly scheduled SI sessions, SI Leaders establish a rapport with students, discussing any concerns that students may have. This gives students the opportunity to ask for feedback such as study tips, strategies for taking notes, and the best ways to break down and digest the material at hand. Students have commented that having an SI Leader take the time to give them these types of tips has made them feel less intimidated about approaching subjects like Physics and Biology. Our SI Leaders hope that their insight will help ease any discomfort and confusion that students may have, leaving them to excel at and enjoy the material within the classroom.

One of the main strategies that our SI Leaders utilize is providing students with collaborative learning activities. Collaborative learning activities range anywhere from using a bucket of water to demonstrate the laws of physics to Jeopardy games to solving problems in groups. These activities are designed to move students out of the role of passive recipients of knowledge and into the role of active participants in the learning process. Due to the peer-to-peer interaction that these activities require, students have also been able to form study groups with their fellow peers who attend Supplemental Instruction. Our goal is to give students the tools and resources that they need to excel as they work their way into upper division courses.

Supplemental Instruction has grown to include 20 SI sessions covering 27 course sections during the Fall 2014 semester. We hope to increase our capacity to serve more students by holding more SI sessions in classrooms and conference rooms throughout the UNLV main campus this coming Spring. We would like to take this moment to thank Kristi Swedean and Eric Morrow in Residence Life for allowing us use of the Dayton and Tonopah conference rooms for SI sessions, as well as Evynne Clay and Rochelle Walker in the Office of the Registrar for helping us find classroom space for sessions. We would also like to thank Dr. Anne White (Associate Director of Learning Support), Dr. Ann McDonough (Dean of the ASC), and the rest of the ASC Executive Team, for their continued support and leadership while we continue to work to grow the SI program.

By: Elle House and Samantha Grider
Tutoring

Former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Anan once said, “Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.” In modern society, a college degree is paramount to future success. Through my last nine months working as a Graduate Assistant for the library tutoring lab, I have seen tremendous growth, both professionally and personally. As more and more student utilize tutoring services, it becomes even more important for useful staff development.

This development is vital to staff both now and in the future. Tutors graduate and obtain employment. Many strive for medical or dental school. For many, tutoring is their first job. The skills they develop now will aid them in the future. Staff members applying to professional schools boast a 100% acceptance rate. The employment of staff after graduation is just as high.

Teaching is not limited just to the classroom. Medical students must explain procedures and diagnoses to patients with a variety of communication levels. Staff moving into other fields as well admire and appreciate the communication and reliability they have developed as tutors. Former math tutor Ceairra Frickx, now pursuing an education degree in Maryland, says how the diverse staff and student interactions were tough at times, but turned into “an extreme blessing, one that was in disguise for a long time.” By learning how to teach, she became a better student, adapting to various professors’ teaching styles.

From their own heavy course loads to hectic work shifts, tutoring offers vital life lessons for the tutoring staff. Managing stress, connecting to others, balancing competing priorities are teachings that are vital toward personal and professional growth. As professional staff, we must learn to facilitate these developmental opportunities and programs. Lessons learned now will further our student staff in their career and prime them for more of a grasp on their future.

By: Eric Mason, Graduate Assistant for Tutoring

Another Successful Summer Bridge

This summer marked another thriving Expect Success Summer Bridge Program. Under the guidance of Bridge Coordinator, Megan Bavaro, team leaders and tutors ran our rooms and guided students through a review of math skills with an on-line learning platform. 381 students participated in Summer Bridge and 93.2% of the students placed into a 100-level math course. This is an improvement on our previously high placement rate for the 2013 Summer Bridge where 89% of freshmen were able to enroll in a 100-level course. Feedback from the participants showed that they greatly appreciated the use of tutors in the classrooms and how the program was self-paced. We use feedback from the current students and staff member to make changes to the bridge program to constantly focus on improvement. Our tutors are on the front line of the Bridge Program and provide us with valuable feedback on the day to day processes of working with students. Right now we are continuing to assist students build their math skills with our Fall Bridge program. 78 freshmen are currently enrolled and preparing to take the math placement test at the end of the semester. For the summer 2015 we are already beginning to work on strategies to increase enrollment and improve placement scores.
ASC Staff Announcements

Learning Specialist
We would like to introduce the new Learning Specialist at the Academic Success Center (ASC), Dr. Jenya Gaskin. Dr. Gaskin is currently in the process of developing the Learning Specialist Program in order to assist with undergraduate students’ retention, progression, and completion. By visiting with the Learning Specialist, UNLV students will be able to obtain learning evaluations, which will provide them with knowledge of their cognitive strengths and weaknesses. In addition, students will be provided with recommendations, academic success strategies, and referrals to campus resources.

Dr. Gaskin stated, “I love to investigate how students’ brains function. Everyone is unique and has different strengths and areas of need. From the evaluation information, I am able to provide specific strategies or interventions to assist students in their classes. One of the best strategies is for students to use their cognitive strengths in order to facilitate learning of difficult course material.”

She has experience providing evaluations across the life span from ages 2-88. However, she most enjoys working with college students. “There is a huge need for psycho-educational evaluations for college students. Public primary and secondary schools provide free evaluations to their students. In contrast, college students often have to pay hundreds to thousands of dollars to obtain private evaluations. I am thrilled that in the near future, the ASC will enable me to provide low-cost evaluations to UNLV students,” she declared.

Dr. Gaskin earned a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies with a Minor in Spanish from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, a Master of Education in Educational Psychology from the University of Virginia, and a Doctor of Psychology in School Psychology from Rutgers University. Dr. Gaskin has previously worked in multiple settings including at the preschool, primary school, secondary school, and university level and in clinics and private practice.

Assistant Director for Academic Advising
Salvador Mora was recently promoted from Senior Academic Advisor to Assistant Director for Academic Advising with the Academic Success Center. Sal has been with the Academic Success Center since February of 2009 where he started as Academic Advisor. In his role with the Academic Success Center, Sal works with students in the Exploring Major, Non-degree seeking students, returning students, and Non-traditional students/Adult Learner populations. Sal has presented at professional conferences at the regional and national level on technology in advising, multicultural considerations in advising, and on his work with Non-traditional students. Sal has also participated in many outreach events locally and nationally promoting the Academic Success Center’s services within UNLV. Originally from Texas, Sal earned his undergraduate degree in Psychology and Masters in Counseling both from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Sal represents the Academic Success Center in several committees across campus including: Technology in Advising, Nontraditional students, and Faculty Senate’s Academic Standards. Sal’s previous experiences with UNLV were with the Center for Academic Enrichment and Outreach as an Academic Counselor and Program Coordinator with the GEAR UP programs.

In his role as Assistant Director, Sal will continue his contact with the students he currently serves and look forward to expanding the ASC’s community and campus outreach initiatives as they pertain to Advising.