Executive Summary: Learning Commons

Major Program Goals:

- To collaborate with faculty and other campus programs to create, implement, and assess sustainable learning activities that target common cross-disciplinary SLOs.
- Foster use of technology to increase independent learning, to provide support for DE student learning, and to meet academic and industry standards of technology and information literacy
- Connect classroom instruction to academic and student support in order to increase retention and success in gateway courses.
- Promote and model a collaborative, inquiry-based approach to professional learning for faculty and peer educators to provide the opportunity for a more powerful feedback loop room instruction to assessment to revision of curriculum.

Concerns/Trends:

Concerns

- Collecting usage data of the Learning Commons is difficult as there is no permanent front desk staff to check in.
- Lack of personnel available to provide continuous service to incoming individual students or groups.
- Lack of sustainable staffing model.
- Lack of institutional support for assessment. Siloed communication across campus.

Trends

- There is surge of awareness amongst instructors about availability, and usefulness of services offered by Learning Commons. (Initially, Passports were primarily used by English instructors interested in encouraging their students to seek support outside class. It was introduced to the campus in Spring 2016. In Fall 2017, 500 Passports were distributed and requested by faculty, which is an uptick of 200 Passports from previous semester.
- The number of unduplicated classes served plummeted in recent terms Fall 2017
- It is a popular service used by various departments, and some specialized programs like GECA. GECA had 250 Unduplicated students in Fall 2016, who had access to Learning Commons.

Plans for Addressing Concerns:

- Implement and assess the internal assessment tool developed.
- By Spring 2017, the Learning Commons and Writing Center established a collaborative approach to training and scheduling a shared staff, and the Learning Commons faculty and staff focused on writing a program plan that clearly identified the program's goals and mission statement using the information learned from the previous semester's restructuring and exploration.
- In Spring 2018, Learning Commons implemented a strong assessment tool that directly measures student growth on specific, targeted skills by recording student strategies before and after the activity.

Recommendations:

- Build, implement and assess a sustainable model to collect unduplicated usage data.
- Collaborate with IT to build a self-login module.
- Design sustainable plan for outreach to Gavilan Community.
- Evaluate overlap with other student support services and identify efficiency opportunities.
- Assess internal assessment tool.
- Investigate opportunities for institutionalizing some services, funded by the college.
- Assess Learning Outcomes.

Self-Study Summary: Learning Commons

The Learning Commons is supported by the five-year Title V Strengthening Outcomes for Hispanic and High-Need Students grant. Learning Commons activities focus on supporting campus efforts to integrate academic learning support into instruction in ways that help students develop the cross-disciplinary academic skills they need to become independent, successful learners.

Currently in its third year, the Learning Commons has undergone several shifts in model, staffing, and funding sources, and the program that exists today is both a space and a program. As a flexible, hybrid space, the Learning Commons curates both planned and spontaneous learning opportunities for students to work on scholarly activities with other students, faculty, peer educators, and staff, both during and outside of instructional time.

As a program, the Learning Commons has identified three key kinds of activities as the most effective use of available staffing and resources:

- Support campus efforts to integrate academic support into instruction,
- Strengthen the collaborative partnerships between all academic support services on campus, and
- Provide quality professional learning opportunities around learning assistance and academic support.
- The Learning Commons has faced several challenges in the first three years that have significantly altered the model and core activities of the program:
- The college's decision to separate the services of the Writing Center from those of the Learning Commons, which relied on close collaboration with the Writing Center's core services, including the embedded peer tutor component, shared staffing, and collaboration with English faculty.
- Changes and vacancies in staffing and budgetary allocations, causing further lack of stability.
- English department's resistance to collaborate on activities due to fear of losing autonomy of the Writing Center
- TimeKeeper is an insufficient data collection tool as it does not distinguish between kinds of services students log in for and is felt by students and peer leaders to be a barrier to entering the space and using services.
- The single faculty coordinator is unable to oversee the space and supervise student workers and leave the space in order to promote learning activities and collaborate with interested faculty
- Faculty do not have the time and are not incentivized to collaborate on innovations to integrate learning assistance into their classroom instruction
- Despite such challenges, the Learning Commons reports significant accomplishments which indicate that the work this program is doing should be continued and supported by the college:
- Learning Commons rebuilt a working relationship with the Writing Center, a relationship that currently includes sharing a co-trained staff, sharing administrative duties and faculty oversight duties, and promoting a clear message of separate and joint services to the campus community.

- Learning Commons played a key role in revitalizing and strengthening the Academic Support Services Group, a group that Learning Commons now informally "chairs" twice per month to develop a unified voice; advocate for professionalism of learning assistance on campus; promote academic support services to students, staff and faculty through a unified website, poster campaign in every classroom, and class visits; and strengthen cross-discipline, cross-program peer education training opportunities.
- Each semester the Learning Commons program exists, the number of students coming into the space increasing, a strength and statement of student support for a supported learning environment that cannot be undervalued.
- To support activities that integrate academic support into instruction, Learning Commons has the flexibility to work with any department or program across campus that serves high-need students.
- Learning Commons is an integrated and collaborative model, ready for Guided Pathways. The cross-disciplinary, collaborative model focuses on building awareness of students' needs and strengths regarding academic work and actively working to design and implement learning activities to help students increase essential study skills. As the campus moves toward guided pathways, the Learning Commons recognizes the need for integrating academic support into classroom instruction.

To build upon these successes and meet the continuing challenges, the Learning Commons requests the following:
- One full-time classified position to efficiently manage daily operations, such as scheduling, timesheets, and usage data collection.
- SARS Track or comparable data collection tool to collect accurate data for assessment across all academic support services.
- Additional faculty oversight to provide appropriate oversight of activities and to integrate academic learning support into instruction.
- Competitive pay for student peer educators to attract quality student leaders and acknowledge learning assistance as a valued asset of the college.
- Funding and administrative support for professional learning for faculty and peer educators around learning assistance and working with high-need students.
- The Academic Support Services Group (ASSG) to have an official voice on campus.

The Learning Commons offers the campus a means of facilitating the integration of academic support into instruction as we move toward Guided Pathways, and the program will continue its commitment to flexibility, collaboration, and responsiveness to our campus partners.