History

In the fall of 2004 the First Year Programs and Disability Services department was reorganized. In this reorganization the programs designed for our First Year students were integrated into existing departments within the Student Life department. The Academic Advising and Disability Services areas continue to be joined together, with direction given by the Provost’s office, and it is these later two areas that will be the focus of this review. The program goals designed for the First Year Programs area have been assumed by the Student Life department.

This report details the progress that has been made in the Academic Advising and Disability Services area towards its program goals stated in the January 2004 proposal. Since the individual who originated the program goals is no longer with the college, and the original program goals were written prior to the departmental reorganization, they have been modified slightly to reflect their new areas of focus and based on the suggestions made by the Program Review Committee.

I. Review of the Original Program Goals from the January 2004 Proposal

A. Students with disabilities will learn to advocate with faculty and staff concerning their specific learning needs.

B. Students on academic probation will gain skills to succeed academically and take responsibility for their learning.

C. Students will begin to think of their major choice and class choices in light of their Christian calling.

II. Review of Program Review Committee Feedback

In March 2004, the Program Review Committee had the following suggestions:

A. “Identify the intended impact of specific teaching strategies.”

Each program goal has been expanded and elaborated on so that the “teachable moments” have been identified and explained. The goals pertaining to Disability Services have been further broken down based on the number of years the student has been receiving services to include smaller steps towards the overall goal. These smaller steps allow for more feedback and correction during the students initial year in the program and a greater degree of independence and responsibility during successive years.
B. “Some of your inputs would be strengthened if stated with greater specificity”

Each program goal has been elaborated upon to include specific steps to implement as well as more detailed assessment methods to determine the extent to which the program goals were met.

C. “It is important to include the ‘when’ and ‘how’ related to your assessment”

The original program goals have been expanded to include additional details as to when and how these learning objectives will be instituted.

III. Focus of the 2004-2005 Review Cycle, from the Updated January 2005 Proposal

Since the original scope of this area has been modified in recent years, and the leadership within the Academic Advising and Disability Services area has changed, a review of the programs ability to implement the updated Program Review goals was necessary. In our initial review there was insufficient evidence that we had the necessary structure in place to implement our program goals. We could not ensure that our students were receiving consistent instruction towards those goals, which made any evidence to come from this evaluation circumspect.

Of greatest concern was Program Review Goal A: “Students with Disabilities will learn to advocate with faculty and staff concerning their specific learning needs.” It was not clear that students had the necessary instruction in the procedures used by the Disability Services office and their own rights and responsibilities as Disability Services students to advocate with faculty and staff.

To this end the past year and a half were spent ensuring that new Disability Service students would be provided with this information as part of their intake meeting during the first semester they received services from the Disability Services office. To facilitate this process a packet of information was produced for the incoming students. The contents of this packet were influenced through discussions with the Disability Services offices at 4 other colleges (other private Christian four year institutions and also public institutions within geographical proximity to Westmont) to see what programs and services they offer as well as the documentation and forms they require of their incoming Disability Service students. The packet of information was reviewed by the College’s Special Assistant to the President for Legal Affairs. This packet included the following information:

1. A brochure providing the basic information and contact numbers for the Disability Services Office
2. General letter of introduction for the new students which includes information on how they can start the accommodation process at the beginning of each semester if they so choose.
3. Initial application to receive services through Disability Services which provides the basic background on their history with the disability, their contact information and the name and number of the testing specialist who will be verifying their disability.
4. Verification of a disability form for their doctor/testing specialist to complete to verify their specific disability and the extent to which it impacts their educational abilities.
5. An information sheet that details the specific documents needed to support the various types of disabilities
6. Legal rights and responsibilities of Disability Services students
7. Confidentiality agreement for Disability Services
8. Procedure forms for the steps the students need to follow in order to receive the various services we offer.

The packet was finalized in the spring of 2006 and will be available to the students entering Westmont in the fall of 2006. With these additional steps in place we can assure that each Disability Services student receives the same information, thereby strengthening the reliability and validity of our results.

IV. Focus of the 2005-2006 Review Cycle, from the Updated January 2005 Proposal

A. Focus 1: Begin working with First Year and Returning students on taking ownership of their disability and the rights and responsibilities included therein.

Even though the Disability Services packet was not available to the incoming and returning Disability Services students at the fall of 2005, the director of the program met individually with each student and, through conversations with the students, provided them with the information contained within the forms. These packets will be sent to all students registered with Disability Services once they are printed.

Specifically during the fall semester we were:

1. Meeting with each student new to the Disability Services program to inform them of their rights and responsibilities and work with them on describing their disability to their professors.

During the course of the fall semester 10 students self identified as students with disabilities. I was able to meet with all 10 to discuss their rights and responsibilities as students with disabilities. Eight of the students self identified early in the semester (within the first 2 months) and two of the students self identified within the last month. For these latter two students I have limited data, as their referrals came so late in the semester and were specific to the single course in which they were experiencing difficulties. Because of this, the focus of my data presented below will be on the eight students mentioned above.
For these eight students I kept records of when they requested services through my office and if they followed the correct procedures to receive those accommodations. I have collected evidence for the following accommodations: proctored exams, notetakers, tutors, and students needing books on tape or to have their books scanned using a software program designed to scan and audibly “read” the text to them.

Of the eight students receiving services through the majority of the semester six had the use of proctored exams as one of their accommodations. Three of these students did not request to have their exams proctored by our department. Of the three students who did have exams proctored by our department, 85% were scheduled following the proper procedures (6 out of 7 exams).

One student requested the use of a notetaker for two of their courses. This student followed the proper procedures for receiving a notetaker.

One student requested the use of a tutor for one of their courses. This student did not follow the proper procedures and was not granted a tutor for the course.

Two students requested to receive their books on tape or to have their books scanned. For the majority of the time both of the students followed the proper procedures and were able to have their books scanned throughout the semester. Unfortunately as the scanning assignments were coming through in large numbers, I do not have numerical data to this effect.

In checking with the professors of the eight students who are receiving accommodations this semester to make sure that the students have given them copies of their accommodation letters I found that, on the whole, the majority of the students did give their letters to their professors. There were two students whose professors either did not respond to inquiries as to having received the letters, or were unsure if they had received a letter. In looking at the accommodations that these students were eligible for, I realized that these two students did not use their accommodations this semester, and so might have been hesitant to give their professors the letters since they did not feel that they needed services.

2. Meeting with each student in their second year in the Disability Services program to remind them of their rights and responsibilities (and hold them accountable to these responsibilities) and work with them on describing their disability to their professors.

During the course of the semester I met with ten students with disabilities who requested services for the fall semester. For these students I kept records of when they requested services through my office and if they followed the correct procedures to receive those accommodations. During their second year, if time
allowed, I made every attempt to honor their requests, even if they had not followed the correct procedures, as long as it was reasonable.

I have collected evidence for the following accommodations: proctored exams, notetakers, tutors, and students needing books on tape or to have their books scanned using a software program designed to scan and audibly “read” the text to them.

Of the ten students receiving services eight had the use of proctored exams as one of their accommodations. All eight requested to have at least one exam through the course of the semester proctored by our department. Of these exams, 79% were scheduled following the proper procedures (41 out of 52 exams).

Five students requested the use of a notetaker for a total of ten courses. All five students followed the proper procedures and received notetakers.

Three students requested the use of a tutor for a total of three courses. These three students followed the procedures for receiving tutoring assistance. One student later dropped the course and the tutoring contract was cancelled.

Two students requested to receive their books on tape or to have their books scanned. Both of the students followed the proper procedures throughout the semester. Unfortunately as the scanning assignments were coming through in large numbers, I do not have numerical data to this effect.

In checking with the professors of the ten students who are receiving accommodations this semester to make sure that the students have given them copies of their accommodation letters I found that, on the whole, the majority of the second year students did give their letters to their professors. Two students had professors who could not remember having received a letter, but those students used their proctoring accommodations consistently through out the semester. For one of those students, a professor did not respond to my inquiry as to having received the letter. This student did not use any of the provided accommodations in the course, so it is unclear if the student felt that she did not need to provide the letter.

3. Meeting with each student in their third and fourth year in the Disability Services program to remind them of their rights and responsibilities (and hold them accountable to these responsibilities) and work with them on describing their disability to their professors.

Of the third and fourth year Disability Services students, I met with twelve of them. For these students I kept records of when they requested services through my office and if they followed the correct procedures to receive those accommodations. During their third and fourth year, if time allowed, I attempted
to honor their requests, even if they had not followed the correct procedures, as long as it was reasonable to do so.

I have collected evidence for the following accommodations: proctored exams, notetakers, tutors, and students needing books on tape or to have their books scanned using a software program designed to scan and audibly “read” the text to them.

Of the twelve students receiving services ten had the use of proctored exams as one of their accommodations. Nine of these students had exams proctored through the Disability Services office. The one student who did not have her exams proctored through Disability Services indicated that she was given the testing accommodations by her professors. Of the exams proctored by our department, 80% were scheduled following the proper procedures (49 out of 61 exams).

Four students requested the use of a notetaker for a total of ten courses. All four students followed the proper procedures and received notetakers. One of the students indicated that they were not happy with their initial notetaker, so a new notetaker was secured for the duration of the semester.

Two students requested the use of a tutor for a total of two courses. Both students followed the proper procedures to request and receive tutoring services.

One student requested to receive their books on tape and the beginning of the semester, but decided midway through the semester that they were able to read the material on their own, and so did not need their books scanned or on tape.

In checking with the professors of the ten students who are receiving accommodations this semester to make sure that the students have given them copies of their accommodation letters I found that the majority of the students did give their letters to their professors. Five students gave their letters to each professor. For one student a professor could not remember having received the letter. For three other students one of their professors did not respond to my inquiry. There were only two students out of ten who did not give their letters to all of their professors during the course of the semester. One student did not give letters to two professors, but she used services from only one of those classes. The other student used services for the class where she did not give a letter to the professor. A follow up meeting will be scheduled with both students to review the procedures for receiving accommodations.

V. Summary of the Fall 2005 Assessment Progress

Overall our activities this past semester have given us a strong format in which to assess our educational objectives, and have already yielded structural changes to the information that we provide to students. These initial changes bring us in line with the typical information given to Disability Services students at neighboring educational institutions.
and allow for a more uniform method of assessment in line with our program goals. Our work this past year gives us the foundation by which we can feel confident in the validity of our results.

We are excited to see that, for the most part, our students are following the procedures established by our office in receiving their accommodations and feel comfortable talking with their professors about their disability. While not every student is comfortable talking about something so personal to them with an authority figure, Westmont’s emphasis on building a caring supportive community helps make these conversations happen.

V. What’s next in the 2005-2006 Academic Year?

A. Focus 1: Begin working with First Year and Returning students on taking ownership of their disability and the rights and responsibilities included therein.

I will be continuing to collect data for the rest of the 2005-2006 academic year on these areas.

B. Focus 2: Continue working with students on academic probation to help them gain skills to succeed academically and take responsibility for their learning

1. I have been meeting with students over the last two semesters and have their self-assessment data coded, but have not analyzed the data yet for the semesters after they were on probation.

2. I am currently working with students who are on probation to identify key areas of success and failure in the previous semester(s), to develop an individual program for success and to identify resources on campus that can assist them in their academic goals.

3. I will be attending a conference in February that will cover the legal, ethical and philosophical aspects of the academic advising process. I hope that the things I learn from this conference will make these meetings with students on probation more meaningful, and also provide additional information as we consider to modify the structure of our academic advising department

V. What’s next for Future Assessment?

A. Work on the remaining portion of the program review goals, specifically:

1. Looking at the institutional structure of the academic advising program, and the possibility of exploring alternate designs for advising students within their first two years.
2. Increased connection and networking between the Office of Life Planning and our advising of First Year students.

3. Including a stated emphasis on choosing majors and classes in light of a Christian calling through our published materials on advising and the advisor training of new faculty.

B. **Continue to collect data on students with disabilities and our students who are on academic probation**