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## THE LEARNING ASSISTANCE REVIEW

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGE LEARNING CENTER ASSOCIATION

ISSN 1087-0059  
Volume 6 Number 2  
Fall 2001

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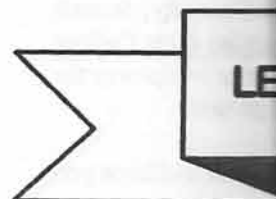
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To our readers:

When we examine why learning centers work, we often realize it is the interaction of students we interact with at the learning center and the

Our first article focuses on the difficulties who not only learn themselves. Commanding student self-assessment, recognition of the benefits of confidence, and engagement

Next, Dickel and McClure support on a small liberal arts college to address issues of race and experience and multiracial collective approach to change program for first year domestic about issues of race in academic the systematic nature of race

Ever wonder where you'd be? Ever wonder what these tutors think makes a good tutor? Different perspectives. In an interpretive Dvorak addresses the college affect learning outcomes, the relation between tutoring. In *Join the Conversation*, Pip shares insights she gained. Besides, but will also assist you

We tempt you with two books referred to as positive influence interest you in these books as College: Students Speak The

## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

To our readers:

When we examine why learning centers are such exciting, vibrant, and rewarding places to work, we often realize it is because of the wide array of issues we tackle and the broad range of students we interact with. This issue of the journal gives you a taste of the rich variety of the learning center and the depth of our practice.

Our first article focuses on the students we often have in our classes—those with academic difficulties who not only need to develop study strategies but also need to learn about learning itself. Commander and Valeri-Gold explore the use of a learning portfolio to facilitate student self-assessment of the learning process itself. Results include a new recognition of the benefits of organizational skills, plus increased awareness of learning, confidence, and engagement in reflection, in short, increased metacognitive awareness.

Next, Dickel and McClure explore the role of the learning center in providing multicultural support on a small liberal arts campus. They describe the systematic approach they've taken to address issues of race and racism in order to more fully develop a successful academic experience and multiracial learning community for all students at the college. Modeling a collective approach to change, programmatic approaches discussed include a peer-mentoring program for first year domestic students of color, a speaker series designed to raise questions about issues of race in academics, and a series of Undoing Racism workshops that focus on the systematic nature of racism.

Ever wonder where you'd be without all the peer tutors that help you help other students? Ever wonder what these tutors think about their work, how tutoring affects them, what they think makes a good tutor? Dvorak and Piper explore this important issue from two different perspectives. In an interpretative case study of a tutoring center at a large urban university, Dvorak addresses the college tutoring experience by looking at the processes of tutoring that affect learning outcomes, the qualities of a "good" tutor, the effect of tutoring on the tutor, the relation between tutoring and students' learning, and the satisfaction of tutor and tutee. In *Join the Conversation*, Piper reports on her informal discussions with groups of tutors and shares insights she gained. Both articles will not only help you to see tutoring from the other side, but will also assist you to analyze and improve your program.

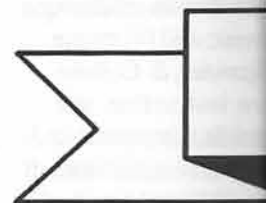
We tempt you with two book reviews this fall. Interestingly, and merely by chance, both are referred to as positive influences in Dickel and McClure's article; we hope the reviews will interest you in these books as well. Frederick discusses highlights from *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*, a book that offers insights into what makes college

memorable and successful. Based upon hundreds of student interviews, its many findings and suggestions offer learning center professionals valuable insights. Secondly, Stovall reviews Time to Know Them: A Longitudinal Study of Writing and Learning at the College Level. Stovall tells us it is a book that will intrigue any writing teacher as it explores the interconnectedness of learning and writing and becoming an educated person.

As always, we invite you to share your thoughts and responses to the journal and hope you enjoy the current issue.

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## THE VALUATION MET

By Nannette Evans Corbett

Many educators are drawn to portfolios as a way to assess students in the learning process. Instructors working with students who have academic difficulty require a way to monitor academic success. A Learning Portfolio is a way for students to demonstrate what they have learned. A Learning Portfolio is a crucial element for success.

Portfolios are not a new field of education, portfolio research has been around for a long time. Ample research literature from kindergarten level (Tillema & Smith, 2000) work that tell the story of define portfolios as:

A portfolio is a set of work gathered across disciplines through collaboration (p. 31)

Many educators are drawn to portfolios as a way to assess students in the learning process.





## ARTICLES

### **THE LEARNING PORTFOLIO: A VALUABLE TOOL FOR INCREASING METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS**

*By Nannette Evans Commander and Maria Valeri-Gold, Georgia State University*

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#### **Abstract**

Many educators are drawn to portfolio use because of the promise it offers for engaging students in the learning process and for improved assessment. This article describes how instructors working with at-risk students have effectively used a "Learning Portfolio" to increase metacognitive awareness. A learning strategies course for students experiencing academic difficulty requires individual portfolios that document efforts to improve and monitor academic success throughout the semester. Strategy transfer is encouraged as students demonstrate practice and application of study skills in content area courses. The Learning Portfolio is a method that facilitates student participation in a self-assessment of what they have learned about learning. The result is increased metacognitive awareness, a crucial element for successful academic achievement.

Portfolios are not a new concept. Artists and writers have used portfolios for years. In the field of education, portfolios have been adapted to virtually any subject area and grade level. Ample research literature attests to the positive impact of portfolios on teachers and students from kindergarten level through college (Askham, 1997; Cambridge, 1996; Mullin, 1998; Tillema & Smith, 2000). Definitions vary but portfolios usually involve examples of student work that tell the story of achievement or growth. For example, Wolf and Siu-Runyan (1996) define portfolios as:

A portfolio is a selective collection of student work and records of progress gathered across diverse contexts over time, framed by reflection and enriched through collaboration, that has as its aim the advancement of student learning.  
(p. 31)

Many educators are drawn to portfolio use because of the promise it offers for engaging students in the learning process and for improved assessment. Some attributes of portfolios

are that they (a) capture the intellectual substance and learning situation in ways that other methods of evaluation cannot; (b) encourage students to take a role in the documentation, observation, and review of learning; (c) are a powerful tool for improvement; and (d) create a culture of professionalism about learning (Cambridge, 1996). Arter, Spandel, & Culham (1995) remind us that the two basic reasons for doing portfolios are instruction and assessment. For instructional purposes, the process involved in assembling a portfolio fosters "student self-reflection, critical thinking, responsibility for learning, and content area skills and knowledge" (p. 1). For assessment purposes, some reasons offered for the collection of student work over time include the possibility for a more in-depth look at what students know and can do and the opportunity to base assessment on more "authentic" work.

It was with these positive qualities in mind that a portfolio system designated the "Learning Portfolio" was designed as part of the curriculum of a study strategies course for at-risk students in a major urban university. This 3 credit hour course, entitled, "Survival Skills for College," is a central component of a retention effort for students between 15 and 60 hours whose cumulative grade point average (gpa) is below a 2.0. Of the students enrolled in this course during Spring semester, 2001 (n=995), 55% were female (n=551) and 45% were male (n=444), 32% were white (n=320), 50% were black (n=500), and 18% were Asian/Asian American, Hispanic, Native American or other, and 49% (n=484) entered the university as freshmen. Although students receive a letter grade that is computed into their earned gpa, the course, which in some instances may be required, does not apply toward graduation. Instructional modules include study skills (time management, note taking, test taking, reading comprehension, memory); student identity (values, cultural identity, student campus identity, cultural integration and personal growth); health and wellness (stress, nutrition, anxiety, managing feelings); communication (oral and written, financial aid, civility, harassment, discrimination); relationships (verbal and nonverbal listening, assertiveness); and confidence building (multiple intelligences, sense of self, locus of control). Instructors meet with students one-on-one at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester to focus on personal, social, and academic needs and to review progress.

Research indicates that many college students would benefit from direct instruction in the skills that are often offered in such study strategies courses. Weinstein (1996; 1993) argues that students would benefit from adopting characteristics of expert learners with learning-to-learn strategies that enhance metacognition. In fact, research suggests that metacognitive awareness of both reading and writing skills can be enhanced through direct instruction (El-Hindi, 1996). Thus, efforts to enhance metacognition or one's ability to think about thinking and to regulate thinking processes are worthwhile. To this end, instructors of "Survival Skills for College" use the Learning Portfolio as a tool for increasing students' metacognitive awareness. Students engage in the process of compiling documents that reflect their efforts to improve and monitor their academic success throughout the semester. Since the majority of students are enrolled concurrently in credit-bearing, content area courses, strategy transfer is encouraged as students document in their portfolio how they are practicing and applying academic skills. Further, students are asked to select one particular content area course to identify as their "target course." The Learning Portfolio is presented as a method of demonstrating efforts for effective and successful learning in this particular

course. Although emphasis is placed on the application of learning skills

According to Busboom (1996), the four major areas of attitude are: The area of attitudinal awareness toward school and academic observations, study skills in reactions to academic tasks and react to what they have skills in need of improvement reports, projects, etc. Finally document growth. For instance, instructors, and reviews of and feedback.

The Learning Portfolio is designed in the four areas outlined in creating their Learning Portfolio beginning of the semester. It is designed by both the student and instructor to create concrete measurable goals for collaboration with the instructor when necessary and then evaluate. Students are informed that the contents and dividers of the notebook or the dividers in the minimum the following sections: Learning Styles, Writing,

One strength of the Learning Portfolio is the awareness. When students are aware of their attitude toward academics, it helps them achieve academic outcomes. Objective Survey (Michael, Michael, Hansen, Borgen, & Hamann) Skills for College course

Likewise, objective documentation encourages students' engagement in purpose, journal writing, self-assessment and metacognition.



course. Although emphasis is placed on the target course, documentation in the portfolio of application of learning skills in other courses is welcomed.

### Contents of the Learning Portfolio

According to Busboom (1991), a "literacy-based portfolio," contains material that fits into the four major areas of attitudinal awareness, process, product, and evaluation and feedback. The area of attitudinal awareness includes any materials that address the students' feelings toward school and academics. Examples are reading inventories, surveys, questionnaires, observations, study skills inventories, etc. The process area includes materials addressing reactions to academic tasks, such as literature logs in which students record their readings and react to what they have read. The product area documents the students' strengths and skills in need of improvement. Examples are work samples of edited and revised drafts, reports, projects, etc. Finally, the area of evaluation and feedback includes any materials that document growth. For instance, standardized and nonstandardized tests, comments from instructors, and reviews of work by peers represent documentation in the area of evaluation and feedback.

The Learning Portfolio is designed as a literacy-based portfolio in that it contains documents in the four areas outlined by Busboom (1991). Students receive general directions for creating their Learning Portfolio (see Appendix A) at the individual conference at the beginning of the semester. Students are also asked to submit a formal Action Plan in writing, signed by both the student and instructor, that focuses on improving academic progress with concrete measurable goals and specific dates for accomplishment of these goals. In collaboration with the instructor, students monitor the plan and make appropriate changes when necessary and then evaluate the success or failure of the plan in terms of their goals. Students are informed that the portfolio requires a three-ring binder notebook with a table of contents and dividers or tabs for different sections. Creativity regarding the cover of the notebook or the dividers is strongly encouraged. It is suggested that students include at a minimum the following sections in their portfolio: Personal, Note Taking, Test Taking, Learning Styles, Writing, and Reading.

One strength of the Learning Portfolio is that it focuses students' attention on attitudinal awareness. When students compile different materials that document personal feelings toward academics, it heightens their awareness of how their attitude might be affecting academic outcomes. Objective instruments, such as The Study Attitudes and Motivation Survey (Michael, Michael, & Zimmerman, 1985) and the Strong Interest Inventory (Harmon, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer, 1994) have been distributed during class time in the Survival Skills for College course for this purpose of increasing attitude awareness.

Likewise, objective documentation of materials representing learning as a process encourages students' engagement in learning and assessment of their own progress. For this purpose, journal writing is required of students in order to focus attention on the skills of self-assessment and metacognitive awareness. Presented as a Monitoring Journal to be

included in the Learning Portfolio, specific directions are provided to structure responses with weekly prompts for each journal entry (see Appendix B).

Requirements of the student's selected "target course" as well as materials from other content area courses, such as essays, research papers, or projects, readily provide the product materials. Grades on tests, teacher comments on papers, or peer reviews of work are examples in the area of evaluation and feedback.

### Example Learning Portfolio

A Learning Portfolio from a typical student in the Survival Skills For College class contained the following documents representing Busboom's (1991) four areas of a "literacy-based portfolio":

#### Attitudinal Awareness

- ▶ Study Attitudes and Methods Survey (Michael, et al. 1985)
- ▶ Strong Interest Inventory (Harmon, et al. 1994)
- ▶ Autobiographical Essay on Who Am I?
- ▶ Learning Style Inventory

#### Process

- ▶ Monitoring Journal

#### Product

- ▶ Examples of Different Methods of Note Taking (Cornell, Note Cards, Mapping, etc.)
- ▶ Writing Samples

#### Evaluation and Feedback

- ▶ Peer review of writing samples
- ▶ Teacher comments on essays
- ▶ Tests from content area course

### Evaluating the Learning Portfolio

Instructors periodically collect the portfolios to provide feedback on The Learning Portfolio on an informal basis. At the end of the semester the Learning Portfolio is formally reviewed during a conference with the student and instructor. Students are required to include an essay titled "That Was Then, This Is Now!" at the front of the portfolio that guides the reader through the documents. Directions for the essay follow:

This essay will be a guide for the reader of your Learning Portfolio. The overall theme of the essay is the growth you have experienced as a learner supported by the materials you have selected to include as documentation. Your essay should address, but not be limited to, the following questions:

1. What is your most accomplished? How did you address the ex at the beginning essay). If you actions you im
2. How have yo learning? An Portfolio, i.e., For each area now." What h approach to le
3. Finally, do yo experience? V focuses on yo that work. D Describe how

An evaluation form (se portfolios structures feed and quality of support creativity. Typically, st represents one-fifth of ti

Each activity of the L assessment. Reviewing y sharing personal respon processes of learning. S increased reflection, eva for learning (Paris & I empirical investigations study by van Kraayeno own work and provide that influence learning one's work is linked to

The Learning Portfolio assessment. In essays creation of the portfolio of these comments had Students' comments al

1. What is your vision of a successful learner? Do you feel that you have accomplished your goals this semester? Refer to your action plan and address the extent to which you have fulfilled the criteria established at the beginning of the semester (please attach the action plan to the essay). If you did not reach your goals, explain why not and what actions you intend to take in the future.
2. How have you gained more control and sophistication about your learning? Answer this question for each section of the Learning Portfolio, i.e., tests, note taking, learning style, writing, and reading. For each area of growth, provide some information on "then and now." What have you done differently this semester as far as your approach to learning?
3. Finally, do you feel creating a Learning Portfolio was a worthwhile experience? Why or why not? A portfolio is a record of learning that focuses on your work and your reflections or metacognition regarding that work. Did the portfolio encourage reflection on learning? Describe how you monitor your learning "then and now."

An evaluation form (see Appendix C) given to students at they begin work on their portfolios structures feedback in terms of content and style of the essay. Relevance, number, and quality of supporting documents are reviewed as well as appearance and overall creativity. Typically, students can earn a total of 100 points for the portfolio which represents one-fifth of their course grade.

### **Benefits to Students**

Each activity of the Learning Portfolio provides an important opportunity for self-assessment. Reviewing work samples, projects, academic skill building, and progress while sharing personal responses to school work all represent self-assessment of products and processes of learning. Such assessment opportunities foster benefits to students such as increased reflection, evaluation of one's work, and feelings of ownership and responsibility for learning (Paris & Paris, 2001). Although there is a surprisingly small number of empirical investigations on how these types of activities are related to self-assessment, a study by van Kraayenoord and Paris (1997) indicated that students are able to assess their own work and provide cognitive and affective evaluations according to particular features that influence learning. Further, the results of this study indicated that the ability to assess one's work is linked to the ability to evaluate literacy strategies.

The Learning Portfolio is a structured method for developing this important skill of self-assessment. In essays and journals, students provided comments that indicated that the creation of the portfolio increased awareness of learning. While anecdotal evidence, many of these comments had clear themes of the positive effects of self-assessment of learning. Students' comments also reinforced the concept that what is really important is not the

Learning Portfolio itself as much as what students learn by creating it. In other words, the Learning Portfolio is a means to an end, not the end itself.

Portfolio excerpts reveal that increased awareness of learning is evident in a variety of forms. In a sample of responses ( $n=28$ ) to the question, "Do you feel creating a Learning Portfolio was a worthwhile experience? Why or why not?" 39% ( $n=11$ ) of the students wrote that creating the Learning Portfolio increased their confidence. Examples of these responses follow:

Overall I feel the idea of a portfolio is a good concept. It is a form of hindsight that can help people see how far they've come. A portfolio can either show areas of improvement or show areas where improvement is needed. It allows people to see their accomplishments and how far they've come. Creating the portfolio as the semester progressed helped me see my improvements more clearly.

Overall my confidence level has come up. I doubt myself less and I'm fully aware that I'm in total control of my success. This attitude has affected my personal life also. I find myself glowing and happier. It has been a long, long time since I felt this way.

My first thought on a portfolio was "Why?" I thought that it was too much work for the class and that I should just turn in my work and be done with it. Then I realized that I was making an easy situation difficult. I like to see what progress that I have made. Also it will be nice to have something to reflect on when I am out of this class and more importantly when I graduate. The Learning Portfolio made me realize that I have come further than I thought. Previously I was measuring my academic success by how quickly I was completing my degree. With the portfolio I learned to see the little steps and the progress I am making. It allows me to see that what I thought was a little progress is not so little after all.

In the same sample of responses ( $n=28$ ) to the question, "Do you feel creating a Learning Portfolio was a worthwhile experience? Why or why not?" 50% ( $n=14$ ) of the students described the benefits of reflecting on learning. Examples of these responses follow:

Through the various lectures, activities, and assignments we had in this course, I feel that having a portfolio helped me substantially. Through organizing the information, I was able to reflect back on anything I was having trouble on. Not to mention the portfolio itself holds a great amount of significance to me because it carries information that helped me improve and become a successful learner. Looking back I see that I was a student that lacked learning skills, but after the information that was shared with me in my portfolio, I can truly say I became a successful student.

The Learning Portfolio gave me a chance to reflect on the semester. I can see where I've changed, where I haven't, and where I still need improvement. After

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In addition to increasing  
11 students (47%) in  
monitoring of the learning

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Excerpts also reveal that  
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responses follow:

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The Learning Portfolio  
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this class I also  
into it. I was ready  
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the semester is over I know that I'll continue to use everything that I've learned throughout the rest of my college life and maybe even into my career. I learned that if I just sit down and actually monitor my learning I can see where I need the help and improve on it. I know now that I will succeed in whatever I put my heart into.

In addition to increased confidence and engagement in reflection, written comments from 11 students (47%) in this same sample indicate that creating a Learning Portfolio fostered monitoring of the learning process. Examples of these responses follow:

The Learning Portfolio required a lot of time, thinking, and work. Yes, this portfolio gave me an overview of what I have learned and done this semester, but actually doing it added to the stress and pile up of work that comes with the end of the semester. Even though I felt the pressure of putting this portfolio together it did push me to monitor my learning, which is something that I did not do before.

Creating the Learning Portfolio was a big help to see all the work I have done this semester come together and see the big picture of what kind of student I am, so this was a very worthwhile project. The portfolio helped me to see my strengths and weaknesses and what I really need to work on to become a successful student. I will monitor my learning from now on by putting together my own portfolio every semester to see how I am coming along.

Excerpts also reveal that 21% of the students ( $n=6$ ) believe the Learning Portfolio resulted in an awareness of the academic benefits of organizational skills. Examples of these responses follow:

I feel that having to do a Learning Portfolio is a good idea. I feel that each class should require each student to do one. This is the first time that I have had to do a portfolio and I love it. It helps me to gather all the work that I have done, and it gives me a sense of encouragement. This has encouraged me to keep a portfolio of all my work in the future for future classes. Before I began this portfolio, my work was scattered everywhere. I would constantly have to look through my book bag. I would have to look through my note books and I would even have to look through my trunk. Since we started this portfolio, it is easier for me to reference my work. This is an idea that I plan to continue with, not only with my school assignments but also with personal information.

The Learning Portfolio is a great way to show how well you learn as time goes by. I have learned many things with this portfolio. While I made a portfolio for this class I also made one for another class and put what I learned from this class into it. I was reaching for an A in that class. My portfolio was nice and neat and I received an A in the class thanks to the first portfolio I had to make.



## Conclusion

Psychologist Lauren Resnick comments that, "what we assess is what we value. We get what we assess, and if we don't assess it, we don't get it" (cited in Wiggins, 1990). This statement is being applied to the connection between what teachers assess and what students learn. These same principles may apply to what students assess and what they learn. The Learning Portfolio is a method for students to participate in self-assessment of what they have learned about learning. For at-risk students, creating Learning Portfolios results in increased metacognitive awareness, a crucial element for successful academic achievement.

The Learning Portfolio reflects your academic documents, thinking content. This will help you. You may want to maintain a course to focus on the course.

One problem with the time to reflect to reflect on your Learning Portfolio. Remember, how Learning Portfolio

The Portfolio sections.

Sections will include photos and a reflection Management, N

## **Appendix A**

### **Directions for the Learning Portfolio**

#### **Description**

The Learning Portfolio is an opportunity for you to collect your academic work in a way that reflects your academic development and accomplishments. As you are collecting various documents, think of your portfolio as a work in progress with movable pages and changing content. This will be a record of your skills, knowledge, and attitude toward your academics. You may want to consider the portfolio as a learning tool that provides an opportunity to maintain a comprehensive record of your work. Each student will select a content area course to focus on, and the Learning Portfolio will document progress made in this "target" course.

One problem with today's culture is the lack of time taken for reflection. Great leaders make the time to reflect on accomplishments and set benchmarks for success. Use the Portfolio to reflect on your accomplishments and to set benchmarks for success in the academic arena. Remember, however, that success often requires a willingness to grow and change, and the Learning Portfolio serves as a means to measure and record your growth and change.

#### **Materials**

The Portfolio will require a 3-ring binder notebook and dividers or tabs for different sections.

#### **Sections**

Sections will include, but not be limited to Personal Information (this area may include photos and a record of previous achievements), Monitoring Journal, Learning Style, Time Management, Note Taking, Test Taking, Writing, and Reading.

## Appendix B

### Monitoring Journal

#### Weekly Prompts:

1. Monitoring Others' Behaviors. Carefully observe the behaviors of students in your target class. What surprises you? What did you expect? Take notes on what you see. What behaviors do you feel will foster success, and what behaviors will hinder success? Describe several students.
2. Monitoring Note Taking. Reflect on your ability to take notes both in your target class and from the text for your target class. Within your discussion include an evaluation of changes you have made in your method of note taking, your progress, problems that you have encountered, and solutions that work and do not work for you. How are you organizing your notes to show levels of significance? How are you indicating possible test questions? Are you able to understand your notes when you review them? Are you editing your notes? When you study your notes, are you using the recall column and reciting the information out loud?
3. Monitoring Use of Resources. We have talked at length about the various resources available on campus to help students succeed academically. Select one of these resources (professor's office hours, tutorial lab, writing center, study groups, etc.) and seek learning assistance. Describe what happened. What did you ask? What did you learn? How would you evaluate the benefits? Describe other students who were also there. Will you go again? Why or why not?
4. Monitoring Test Taking. Select one test from your target class and answer the following questions:
  - A. Which part of the exam was the easiest for you? Why?
  - B. Which part of the exam was the most difficult? Why?
  - C. Which of the following activities did you complete prior to the exam?
    - 1) all required reading assignments
    - 2) preparation and review of reading notes
    - 3) review of lecture notes
    - 4) self-testing of materials to be covered by the exam
    - 5) prediction of possible questions by you prior to the exam
    - 6) study with friends
  - D. Which of the above did you find most helpful in preparing for this exam?
  - E. How much time (in hours) did you spend preparing for the exam?
  - F. Did you feel prepared when you walked into the exam? Why or why not?
  - G. What changes might you make in the way you study for the next exam in this course?

5. Monitoring Your Academic Behavior. Portray the part of you that may be preventing you from being an "A" student. Write a two-page script to portray yourself in a situation that exemplifies what you feel are nonproductive behaviors, bad habits, and/or poor choices. Through your script let us see the part of you that needs change. Be entertaining and informative.
6. Monitoring Collaborative Learning. Throughout this course you have been encouraged to collaborate with fellow students. You have probably experienced collaborative learning by small groups in class or you may have collaborated independently with another student. On the basis of your experiences, what insights have you gained from collaborative learning? What factors do you feel are essential for successful collaborative learning? When does it click for you? Why is collaborative learning sometimes unsuccessful? How do you think you will use collaborative learning in the future?
7. Monitoring Your Writing. You have most likely been assigned many various writing tasks in your academic courses. Please discuss anything you would like to regarding your experiences with the writing process. Some questions you might consider are:
  - A. Is the process of writing a positive or negative experience for you? Give reasons for your answer.
  - B. Describe how you approach a writing task, and what strategies you have found to be helpful.
  - C. Have you ever experienced writer's block, and if so, how did you overcome it?
  - D. How often do you revise papers and how often do you get help with the process of revising?
  - E. What advice would you give other students on writing?
8. Monitoring Your Learning Style. What is your learning style? Write about how you learn best based on the information provided by the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator and the exercises in your text on learning style. Some questions to consider are:
  - A. Identify your learning style and describe what the inventory revealed about you.
  - B. Explain how you learn best and why. Then explain the circumstances that may make learning difficult for you and why that is the case.
  - C. Describe how your learning style complements and conflicts with your instructors' style of teaching. Explain the strategies you use when your learning style conflicts with your instructor's teaching style.
  - D. How can you adapt your learning style for different types of courses?

9. Monitoring Your Reading. What specific strategies do you use when reading a textbook? How do these strategies help you to comprehend the material? Are you systematic in your approach to understanding text? Reflect on your comprehension level while using the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review) or SOAR (Survey, Organize, Anticipate Test Questions, and Recite) methods for textbook reading.
10. Monitoring This Course. What have you learned in this course that was the most helpful? Why? What have you learned in this course that has been least helpful? Was the Monitoring Journal beneficial to you? Why or why not? If you were the instructor of a course to help students succeed academically what would be the main topic you would focus on? How would you design the course? What suggestions do you have that might make this course more effective for future students?

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Maximum Score = \_\_\_\_\_

Required Essay (30 points)

- ▶ Content taken to \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Style: O \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Documents (20 points)

- ▶ Relevance to growth \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Number \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Quality \_\_\_\_\_

Additional (20 points)

- ▶ Appearance \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Overall \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of points \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C

### Portfolio Evaluation

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Maximum Score = 100 points

#### Required Essay (30 points)

- |  |           |      |      |      |
|--|-----------|------|------|------|
| ▶ Content: Clarity of growth areas, actions taken to facilitate growth, and outcomes | excellent | good | fair | poor |
| ▶ Style: Overall quality of writing  | excellent | good | fair | poor |

#### Supporting Documents (50 points)

- |   |           |      |      |      |
|---|-----------|------|------|------|
| ▶ Relevance of supporting documents to growth areas | excellent | good | fair | poor |
| ▶ Number of supporting documents included           | excellent | good | fair | poor |
| ▶ Quality of supporting documents                   | excellent | good | fair | poor |

#### Additional (20 points)

- |                           |           |      |      |      |
|---------------------------|-----------|------|------|------|
| ▶ Appearance of portfolio | excellent | good | fair | poor |
| ▶ Overall creativity      | excellent | good | fair | poor |

Total number of points: \_\_\_\_\_ Percentage: \_\_\_\_\_ Letter grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

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# MIXING IT UP: MULTICULTURAL SUPPORT AND THE LEARNING CENTER

By Michael Dickel and Sedric McClure, Macalester College

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## Abstract

Specific events and policies at Macalester College placed significant responsibility for multicultural support within the Learning Center. Learning Center staff chose to take a systemic approach to working with issues of multiculturalism, focusing on race. This approach arose from two campus contexts: anti-racism activism and the reorganization of multicultural affairs. Three approaches were engaged: a peer-mentoring program, a speaker series, and continued logistical and administrative support for Undoing Racism workshops. It is argued that such a systemic approach is necessary to move "toward realizing our vision of a vibrant multicultural and multiracial learning community" (McPherson, 1998, p. 1).

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## Introduction

With increasing diversity on college campuses, there is an increasing need for the campus community to focus on facets of the whole student population in order to more fully develop a successful academic experience for all students. For the Macalester College Learning Center, two such facets are race and racism. Learning centers often find themselves at the nexus of multiple populations that are struggling to assimilate or to resist assimilation into the white academic mainstream. This has been particularly true on our campus for different groups of students of color who have engaged in their respective struggles to find their own place on a predominantly white campus while succeeding academically in a white-dominated academic environment.

As part of a campus-wide reorganization of multicultural affairs in the 1999-2000 academic year, Macalester College's Learning Center became newly responsible for supporting the academic achievement of students of color. One of our major challenges was how to approach this new role without treating students of color as though their racial status was a "problem," or as though their racial status meant they could not handle the academic workload. Rather, we wanted to support these students to do well academically while struggling against such racist assumptions. Over the past two years, the Learning Center, in collaboration with other campus units, has taken on this challenge with three major approaches: a) a peer-mentoring program called Student Allies for Academic Success (SAAS), run by students of color for students of color; b) a campus-wide series of outside speakers to promote discussion about issues related to academic achievement and race that raised questions about assumptions within the academy; and c) support for Undoing Racism Workshops and follow-up dialogues that focused on the need for the whole community to

adapt and change, perhaps especially those from the mainstream who most commonly understand their own cultural biases as normative.

As starting points, these programs have helped the Learning Center begin its work in the areas of race and diversity. The programs had mixed success, and we have learned perhaps more about how to improve them than anything else. What follows provides context for how the Learning Center came to take on this role, a rationale for these particular efforts, and a description of the programs themselves along with some ideas for how they might be improved in the future.

### Context

Learning centers work within contexts and histories that serve to create their own unique identity; this includes what services they deliver, who their clients are, and how they approach their mission. There are two contexts for the multicultural component of Macalester College's Learning Center. The first is the institution's official policy for multiculturalism, shaped (some critics on campus might say "mis-shaped") by an ongoing reconfiguration of Macalester's overall multicultural program. The other is less official, and springs from a convergence of events on campus that preceded the official changes.

In December 1998, Macalester College President Mike McPherson distributed his "Advancing our Multicultural Agenda: A Plan for Action." In it, he affirms "...the importance of sustaining and strengthening the College's efforts toward realizing our vision of a vibrant multicultural and multiracial learning community" (p. 1). He argues for the "...need to take seriously the implications of the fact that the College's multicultural agenda is everyone's business—that it must be the responsibility of every office on campus to pursue actively the implications of our commitments to diversity and multiculturalism" (p. 1). In response to concerns about the isolation and marginalization, among others, of a centralized Office for Multicultural Affairs, McPherson proposed disbanding that central office and forming a campus-wide Council of Multicultural Affairs (CMA), modeled on President's and Dean's Councils at the college. He also proposed decentralizing multicultural staff into Student Services (co-curricular) and Academic Programs (academic support), as well as the CMA and Admissions.

This proposal was not without controversy, but when the dust settled, it went forward with some modifications regarding the constitution of the council itself. Each of the two areas—Students Services and Academic Programs—proposed one position, both of which were filled in the 1999-2000 academic year, and an Associate Director of the CMA was hired the following year. These three positions share responsibility for multiculturalism on campus. The Learning Center received one of these front-line positions (one of the authors of this essay). In that same year, a new director was hired for the Learning Center (the other author of this essay) who took this re-constitution of multicultural services as the basis for putting multiculturalism at the center of the Learning Center's mission. The context of institutional reconfiguration of multicultural affairs, therefore, became a key component of our work helping all students do their best academically.

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Interestingly, there is another "official" context beyond Macalester College that provides a rationale for learning centers playing central roles in multicultural issues on campus. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education's Learning Assistance Guidelines contains a section on diversity which states, in part:

The learning assistance program must promote cultural educational experiences that are characterized by open and continuous communication, that deepen understanding of one's own culture and heritage, and that respect and educate about similarities, differences and histories of culture. (Miller, 1999, p. 128)

This standard for reviewing our own work, provided through the efforts of several relevant professional organizations, also lays a foundation for the Learning Center's involvement in multicultural affairs on campus.

Circumstances on campus created a second context for the Learning Center's multicultural focus. About five years ago, racist graffiti in a campus dorm led to a group of concerned students, staff, and faculty meeting regularly. Calling itself the "Dismantling Racism Group," or DRG, this group worked collaboratively as a multi-racial, student, staff, and faculty group to organize against racism on campus and in our society. Eventually, they brought in two outside groups, The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond and Crossroads Ministry, to present a weekend workshop, "Undoing Racism."

The workshop used the skills and strengths of each agency. People's Institute provides an analysis of systemic racism and white supremacy and focuses on community organizing and grassroots activism, while Crossroads uses a similar analysis, but applies it to institutional racism and institutional change. The combination, it was felt, fit Macalester's needs. Since then, there have been about nine of these training workshops attended by faculty, staff, even the president of the college, but mostly by students. Macalester has sent four groups to a national advanced training held by People's Institute, as well. All of these workshops have been funded by the President's Office, and until this past academic year (2000-2001), all had been planned and organized by the DRG. One goal of the DRG, though, was to institutionalize these efforts and place them into play within a larger activist agenda of having Macalester College engage in anti-racist reformation. Anti-racism goes beyond mere inclusiveness to actively engage and resist the institutionalized and systemic practice of race privilege and power.<sup>1</sup>

For reasons beyond the scope of this article, the DRG itself went through serious structural stress that spring, resulting in DRG dismantling itself by the following fall. But, before the members agreed to disband, they asked the Learning Center staff, who were both actively involved in DRG, to continue organizing the training workshops, i.e., doing the logistics and administrative work. We agreed to take this on, with some conditions having to do with an advisory board from the campus cultural organizations and follow-up to the workshops. President McPherson agreed to continue full funding this past year, but not indefinitely. He is supportive of these efforts, however, and has encouraged us to seek other funding sources,



such as grants, and has indicated his willingness to continue institutional funding at some level.

### Rationale

These two contextual elements, the institution's official restructuring of multicultural affairs and the involvement of Learning Center staff within the DRG, significantly shaped the rationale for our programming. In particular, the analysis of systemic and institutional racism provided by The People's Institute and Crossroads Ministry workshops influenced how we approached the responsibility the institution handed us. We were concerned that most "solutions" to racism and many programs on cultural diversity that we were aware of focus on the so-called "victims," and not on an analysis of racism as an institution or on institutional solutions (see Barndt, 1991; Chisom & Washington, 1997; and Guinier, 1998 for similar assessments for our society at large).

Careful readers will note an apparent shift in focus from what is generally regarded as the broad issue of multiculturalism, which contains within it many "isms," many types of diversity, to a focus on racism. The context that gave rise to the DRG and the Undoing Racism workshops provided this focus, highlighting the need on our campus to address race directly. The word "multiculturalism" is very slippery at times and often can be used to obfuscate the issue of racism. There is a real and meaningful difference between what could be termed "anti-racism" and cultural diversity (or multiculturalism), as was pointed out by one of our outside speakers (K. Gilyard, speaker series, March 30, 2001). Before proceeding, it would be useful to present a definition of what we mean by "racism," a word that also can be slippery and has strong emotional connotations. Chapter two of Barndt (1991)<sup>2</sup>, titled "What is White Racism?" explores and refines a definition for the term. It is worthwhile here to quote from the summary of that chapter at length:

In this chapter we have presented and explored three components of a definition of racism: first, racism is prejudice plus power; second, the power of racism in the United States is exclusively in the hands of the white society; and third, the power of racism imprisons and enslaves white people as well as people of color. The goal of overcoming racism is for the sake of all. (Barndt, 1991, p.50)

Our analysis is that white racism places added burdens upon students of color—added academic burdens and added social burdens—that impact their performance and retention, often limiting their willingness to seek help when and where white students in similar situations would and do seek help. These burdens stem from systemic and institutional racism, which are so embedded in our culture that we cannot battle them on an individual by individual basis. Institutions such as ours were created by a white society (white, middle- and upper middle- class males, to be more precise) to serve white society, and during the formative years of U.S. systems of education, one of the perceived "needs" of members of white society was positioning themselves in a particular race and class to the exclusions of others, others being people of color.<sup>3</sup> This formative construction has much to do with the presence of implicit, institutional racism. It is, therefore, our claim that addressing

institutional racism students, but espec Working only with negating their agen can increase the fr the individual in th some models of far

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If experience is learned what they the Macalester co departments such they have learned get connected with student organizati year students how

institutional racism systemically will do more to improve student performance for all students, but especially for students of color than attempting only individual solutions. Working only with individuals places them in the position of so-called "victims," thus negating their agency and hiding the implicit power structure of our society. This, in turn, can increase the frustrations for those individuals if the system continues to push and pull the individual in the same ways that created the original so-called "victimization." As with some models of family therapy, we believe that it takes a system to change a system.

For these reasons, then, we came up with a three-pronged approach for the Learning Center<sup>4</sup>:

1. a peer-mentoring program called Student Allies for Academic Success (SAAS), run by students of color for students of color;
2. a campus-wide series of outside speakers to promote discussion about issues related to academic achievement and race that involved the whole community and raised questions about assumptions within the academy; and
3. support for Undoing Racism Workshops and follow-up dialogues that focused on the need for the whole community to adapt and change, perhaps especially those from the mainstream who most commonly understand their own cultural biases as normative, if they are aware of them at all.

#### **Student Allies for Academic Success (SAAS)**

If college does anything, it must help graduates understand the relationship between the academic world and its relevance to their life and society. Macalester College's Learning Center re-instituted an older Multicultural Peer Advisory Program in the form of a mentoring program for first year domestic students of color. The new multicultural peer mentor program, SAAS, had as one of its goals students making a smooth transition into the Macalester community by helping them to become connected with and to use effectively Macalester resources (student, staff, faculty, programs, and departments). The mentoring program had as its other main goal helping students begin to explore the relationship between the academic world and their life and society—not simply assimilating to academic life, but understanding the relationships between the academy and their lived experiences.

If experience is the best teacher, then we reasoned that returning students of color have learned what they need in order to help first year students of color<sup>5</sup> transition smoothly into the Macalester community. The Learning Center, in collaboration with relevant campus departments such as the CMA and Residential Life, trains returning students to share what they have learned as effective mentors. Effective mentoring involves helping new students get connected with and use Macalester College resources and locate and participate in student organizations. Staff trainers also teach mentors to act as peer advisors, teaching first year students how to negotiate college procedures and campus communication channels.

### **SAAS Models and Design**

There has been a long-standing tradition in communities of color and particularly the African-American community of seeking an education over and against white resistance and racism. We recognize that students of color need to and are fully able to define their own path for education. The SAAS program, first and foremost, wants to root its programming in this tradition and to encourage students to help each other and empower themselves to seek and obtain the education they want. For this reason, much of the programming and content of the program arose from the students of color who were mentors who, in turn, also sought input from their mentees.

Also, academic programs devised by Freeman Hrabowski in the sciences and Uri Treisman in mathematics provide excellent models for academic enrichment which involve developing an academically-focused social environment (Dancis, 2000; Hrabowski, Matson, & Grieb, 1998; Merit Workshop, 1999; Morgan, 1996; Treisman, 1992, 1997; Wilson, 1998). They focus their reform efforts on both the classroom and the social role of academics outside of the classroom. As these models suggest, students who form social study groups that support collaborative learning are more likely to succeed than those who work in isolation. Treisman (1997), in particular, advocates that faculty also encourage collaborative learning by making meaningful assignments based on projects that require application of the course's content and group efforts for completion. While Ira Shor (1992) focuses on the classroom, he makes a similar argument for writing assignments. By extension, students work on out-of-class assignments and collaboratively develop effective learning strategies.

Participants in Treisman's and Hrabowski's academic enrichment programs, whose backgrounds, placement-test scores, and prior achievement indicated they might be at-risk academically, consistently out-perform non-participants whose backgrounds, placement-test scores, and prior achievement indicated they would likely be high-achieving academically (Dancis, 2000; Hrabowski et al., 1998; Treisman, 2000). Shor's writing students wrote at higher levels than students who were similarly tracked into other developmental writing courses (1992). While the Learning Center cannot change classroom practice, the SAAS Program was patterned on Treisman's and Hrabowski's models, with appropriate adjustments, in an attempt to create dynamic, diverse learning communities in the social spaces around and between courses.

Richard Haswell (1999) cites a longitudinal study by Marilyn Sternglass (1997) which strongly suggests that students develop most of their important writing and communication skills not in the classroom, but rather through work that connects classes, discussions with peers, and extra-curricular activities that provide motivation to make well-reasoned arguments. These findings also fit Shor's (1992) classroom model, which seeks to bring these extra-course activities into the writing classroom. Haswell makes the distinction between studying courses, the practice of completing requirements for credits in isolation from one another, and what could be termed a course of study, a practice where students learn to productively connect their academic work to life interests. The SAAS mentoring

program was designed to help students.

To prevent the stigma of remedial levels. Ideally, they could help Hrabowski, and revolutionize the success. In the student to think democratic idea process by helping at Macalester C

In summary, SA first year student academic performance additional adjustments SAAS members opportunities for

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### **Recruiting All**

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program was designed with the idea of fostering this "course of study" ideal among first year students.

To prevent the perception of this being a remedial academic program, and the associated stigma of remedial programs, we hoped to attract students from a cross-section of academic levels. Ideally, we anticipated students forming learning circles throughout campus where they could help each other struggle with common academic challenges. Treisman, Hrabowski, and Shor have successfully demonstrated how faculty and students can revolutionize the learning environment so that it empowers students to achieve academic success. In the context of each model, Hrabowski, Shor, and Haswell argue for helping each student to think critically and become an educated, not trained, student who will advance democratic ideals with agency. The mentoring program, we thought, would begin that process by helping students fully connect to the liberal arts curriculum during their first year at Macalester College.

In summary, SAAS is a peer mentor program for domestic students of color designed to help first year students transition into life at Macalester College with a special emphasis on academic performance. Students of color on predominately "white" campuses face additional adjustment issues that often have a negative impact on academic performance. SAAS members play a significant role in helping first year students turn those barriers into opportunities for academic success.

Assuming proper training, SAAS mentors can teach first year students how to identify faculty, staff, and student allies who can help them excel in and out of the classroom. SAAS members introduce first year students to key college personnel and departments that are particularly situated to meet their complex needs. In addition, allies can help first year students understand and better appreciate the value of first year courses and academic advisors as well as good study habits. First year students are also encouraged to sharpen their academic skills by attending time management and writing workshops offered by the Learning Center. To give academics a cultural or social context, student allies accompany their mentees to guest lecturers who address the social, political, and cultural landscape of the United States. The goal here is to help incoming students adopt an academic schedule that establishes a healthy balance between curricular and co-curricular activities. The emphasis and priority is always on academics.

### **Recruiting Allies**

In the first year of the program, the recruiting of SAAS mentors involved two strategies. The first was the usual advertisement venues that Macalester uses to attract its student employees; campus employment fairs and student publications were key in making students aware of the SAAS mentor program. The second strategy was more effective in actually finding students who would be good mentors: faculty and staff recommendations and referrals. Key faculty advisers and staff were asked to refer students to the Learning Center who would make good allies.

Interviewing and hiring for the second year were done at the end of the first year. An advantage in the second round of hiring was having the first year mentors participate in the referral, interviewing, and decision making. These soon-to-be former and returning mentors tapped into their contacts with cultural organizations and individuals and produced most of the new SAAS mentors. In this way, student ownership of the program and the program's credibility among students of color increased.

The criteria for selecting SAAS mentors were flexible enough to attract a broad pool of talent. Essentially, members had to be in good academic standing (2.5 GPA or higher), knowledgeable of campus resources, and have good interaction and communication skills. We were also seeking students who had demonstrated leadership qualities on campus and who understood circumstances and adjustment challenges unique to domestic students of color.

Allies were paid, either through work-study or as "no-need" student workers. They were paid hourly the first year, but problems arose recording multiple small snippets of time, so a stipend will be paid in the second year. Interestingly, student excitement manifested itself when several students volunteered to participate without pay. Some students had other work-study commitments they did not wish to forego such as, work in their major departments, while others wanted to work even after we had filled the number of funded positions. In either case, the student commitment to the SAAS program was high.

### Training Allies

First, SAAS mentors were trained as orientation leaders for Macalester's orientation program in order to become more acquainted with campus resources related to student life. This included learning more about the staff and functions of residential life, chemical dependency services, library services, computer and information technology support and labs, as well as Macalester's Cultural House, just to name a few.

The second phase of training was with the coordinator of the SAAS program (one of the authors) and included an overview of the program that outlined responsibilities of a SAAS mentor. We covered effective mentoring habits, how to mentor in group settings, and creative ways to connect with students. We also used two major sources to assist us in these matters: Ender and Newton's (2000) *Students Helping Students: A Guide for Peer Educators on College Campuses*, and Light's (2001) *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Mind*. Both of these works explore the history and role of peer educators on college campuses and provide a how-to guide in building relationships among student peers. Light (2001) conducted interviews with college students over ten years and ascertained how students effectively completed college. Good time management skills, multiculturalism, and connecting with faculty were often cited as key determinants of success by student respondents.

Faculty provided ongoing workshops throughout the year to help the students become better peer educators, thereby helping first year students make a smooth transition into academic

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life at Macalester. Our focus is not on a particular subject, however. The energy is directed toward organizing for success, setting goals, and identifying people and resources needed to succeed in all disciplines.

### **Making Mac Work for You**

Through the SAAS program, the Learning Center hosted and facilitated events and activities to help peer mentors and their students establish meaningful academic and social relationships. Among these activities were peer study groups, time management workshops, and a study-day coffee/snack break. These were critical aspects of the mentoring program, providing indispensable components toward the growth and development of the first year students as they joined the wider college community. In these ways, the Learning Center tried to move the peer mentoring program toward influencing the learning environment of participating students.

To achieve these goals, the allies developed and implemented an informational workshop series called Making Mac Work for You. It is important to note that the workshops, the name for the series, and the content came from the active involvement of the allies themselves. The multicultural counselor helped facilitate, coordinate, and administer the workshops, but the students devised the program through several meetings held in the Learning Center. The significance of these workshops was to articulate to first year students that they can, and must, make Macalester College work for them, regardless of other barriers. The workshops took place throughout the year, providing first year students with relevant information about key academic decisions.

Making Mac Work for You kicked off in the beginning of the year when key faculty, staff, and students were invited to a semi-formal program. The faculty and staff were selected by department and field of study and from those who had shown interest in serving as an ally to first year students. During the program, faculty were dispersed among the first year students at various tables, and they all participated in ice-breaking activities. The afternoon culminated with a thought provoking keynote address by Bio Phi, a 1997 Macalester graduate. Beyond reading creative poetry, Bio emphasized the importance of students applying themselves academically and reaching their goals regardless of barriers. Also, Sonita Sarker, a professor in Women and Gender Studies, delivered a powerful message about faculty commitment to students' growth and educational development. The program ended with small group discussions among participants about the importance of first year students beginning their college tenure on a positive note. The goal was to set the tone for high academic performance and the importance of exploiting campus resources.

### **Challenging Assumptions, Practical Solutions**

While we expect that the SAAS program will help students do well at Macalester, we also recognize that both Treisman's and Hrabowski's models involve curricular change, that is, systemic, institutional change, as well. The Learning Center, in our context, has little direct influence on curriculum or institutional policy. That role fell to other programs, particularly

several grant-funded projects on campus. However, with the financial support of the President's Office and the Council for Multicultural Affairs, we were able to bring in outside speakers to raise questions about issues of race in academics in a speakers' series we called: *Challenging Assumptions, Practical Solutions: Examining and Revising Cultural Paradigms in Higher Education*. Richard Light (Harvard), Keith Gilyard (Penn State), and Freeman Hrabowski III (University of Maryland-Baltimore County) came to campus during Spring 2001 to speak about the student experience, college writing, and the sciences, respectively, in relation to race.

Each speaker visited with faculty and staff on campus, with students (including some SAAS participants), and with Learning Center staff, in addition to giving a public talk on campus. Publicity included invitations to key community members, as well as the usual press releases. Yet, in part due to our own inexperience at such a task and in part due to event overload, attendance was not as high as we would have liked. Still, many faculty, staff, and students attended at least one speaker's talk or related event, and there has been some conversation on campus as a result of the talks. The main result of the speaker series, though, is that the Learning Center's profile on campus improved, with more faculty and staff recognizing that we are not just a "fix it" shop.

## Undoing Racism Workshops

About four years ago, the then newly-formed Dismantling Racism Group began bringing to campus two groups, Crossroads Ministry and the People's Institute, to provide anti-racism training for faculty, staff, and students. Since that time, there have been over nine workshops which have evolved to also include alumni, community members, and service providers in the community. Each of these training workshops has focused on the systemic nature of racism, on how institutions function within that system, and on how to organize toward institutional transformation. In the most recent academic year, the Learning Center organized two of these workshops, one in the fall and one in the spring. The funding for this effort has primarily come from the President's Office.

The benefits of these efforts can better be described qualitatively than quantitatively. For students, the benefits range from faculty reports of deeper levels of conversation about race and racism in courses, to influencing topic choices and approaches for senior projects, to internship and community service activities. Students have been the largest group to attend the workshops, so faculty and staff impact is sketchier. Still, many of the faculty involved with multi-cultural efforts on campus have at one time or another participated in the workshop (which is cause, which effect, we cannot say). Staff who have attended have been positive about its benefits in conversations. In addition, staff from numerous service-providing organizations and other institutions of higher education in the adjacent community have attended these training workshops. Service learning opportunities have also arisen out of the relationships between the community and Macalester that have begun with these workshops. It appears as though the workshops have been a “fundamentally transforming experience” for all of those who have participated. However, there has as yet been no systematic assessment of the impact of the workshops using qualitative or quantitative data.

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## Making Mac Work

The ongoing challenge for students beyond the first semester after community behavior in the program or any first semester, extending but they are not requiring mentees in efforts to graduate college.

One of the most effective ways to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed in college is to create learning communities that focus on common academic goals and provide a supportive environment for understanding the material. These communities are designed to help first-year students, not just academically, but also socially, and to provide ways to help first-year students who are struggling. We hope that this model will be adopted by more academically focused colleges and universities.

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This year, the Learning Center, with the CMA Office, instituted some follow-up discussions, one facilitated by faculty and one facilitated by students who attended this year's national advanced training. A result of the follow-up discussions is that a group of students have continued meeting and discussing issues of race and racism on their own, which the Learning Center has supported by simple means, such as buying pizza for a lunch-time gathering. Students who attended the national training have been leaders of this group, but other students have attended regularly as well. Allowing for student agency in their own lives and learning, we have not monitored this group's discussions or given them much direction. We have let the group and its leaders know that our staff and that of the CMA Office are available for discussion, to bounce ideas off of, and to help with any projects they might generate.

### **Future Directions**

#### **Making Mac Work for You**

The ongoing challenge facing SAAS is how to maintain active participation among first year students beyond the first few weeks of the semester. Individual behavior is often patterned after community behaviors. Allies have little leverage to force first year student participation in the program or any SAAS initiatives. All students are sent a letter the summer before their first semester, extending an open invitation; they may participate as their schedule permits, but they are not required to attend. It's incumbent upon each ally to work creatively with the mentees in efforts to get them to demand academic excellence from themselves and from the college.

One of the most effective ways to ensure this happens is by forming learning communities which this year's program attempted, but did not quite achieve. At the core of effective learning communities is good time management. Students who work collaboratively on common academic problems have better chances for solving those problems and for understanding the solutions. The Learning Center will work on building learning communities for next year, using this program as a pilot for future mentoring programs for all students, not just students of color. Peer advisor or mentor programs can be effective ways to help first year students make a smooth transition to Macalester College. It is our hope that this mentoring program will succeed in helping students develop a strong academically focused social environment as we build on its strengths.

#### **Challenging Assumptions, Practical Solutions**

Funding for speakers is by no means assured and is part of a grant proposal to help support most of these activities; only the SAAS program has ongoing funding. However, if we do have speakers in coming years, there are some things we would do differently.

First, we would scale the series back to help alleviate the event-overload phenomenon. One speaker a semester fits the size of our support staff (one person) and of our campus (about 1800 students). That way, we would be able to include more with each visit: more faculty



visits, more meetings with students, and visits by the speakers to relevant courses. We would like to give SAAS students more time with speakers as well.

Second, we would want to prepare the campus better for each speaker. For the first series, we sent out emails, publicity write ups, and contacted faculty we thought would be interested. For next time, we would ask faculty if the speaker could visit classes, send out articles about or by the speaker, and actively recruit more faculty involvement, such as asking faculty to teach a related topics course in an appropriate department.

Finally, we would choose a different evening. We wanted the series to be on the same night of the week, and we wanted to accommodate speakers who were concerned about missing too much of their work week, so we chose Friday evenings. This had ramifications that should have been obvious: faculty wanted to go home or away for the weekend; students had dances, parties, and other programs; and the general public was ready for dinner and a movie rather than a lecture on academia and race. If we do this again, we would look at another night of the week, perhaps Wednesday or Thursday.

### Undoing Racism Workshops

We would like to engage in qualitative and quantitative analysis of the results of the Undoing Racism Workshops on campus life. We are in the process of exploring potential grant sources for continuing these workshops and for expanding them to encourage more faculty and staff involvement. And, we would like to coordinate the workshop efforts with other efforts on campus, such as orientation, professional development, and a new center for teaching and scholarship that will begin next year.

### Conclusion

In order to foster an academic environment that is conducive to all students doing their best work, we must have a systemic approach to solving the issues that individuals face. We should not ignore the needs of individuals, but if we only focus on the individual we fail the collective whole. Our efforts are a humble beginning and stem from our specific context; other contexts would require other approaches. We cannot claim to actually have changed the institution, either. But, we have engaged faculty, staff, and students in community dialogues that we hope will lead toward an improved academic environment that is inclusive in all aspects of campus life and involvement, with few, if any, additional burdens due to race. We have a lot more to do, and pledge to continue on these paths. We hope to see change, but we recognize that it took our society 500 years to get into this racial bind, and change won't happen overnight. So, we will continue our programs with improvements, modifications, and revisions. We will continue to listen to the students as they tell us what they want and need. And, we will continue to work for systemic change "toward realizing our vision of a vibrant multicultural and multiracial learning community" (McPherson, 1998, p. 1).

### Endnotes

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## Endnotes

1. Interested readers can find some sense of what such a reformation might involve and why such a reformation of most, if not all, of our institutions might be necessary by reading Barndt (1991).
2. Barndt, as the founder of Crossroads Ministry, has been instrumental in the Undoing Racism workshops at Macalester College. We are indebted to him and to Chisom, one of the founders of The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, for much of our analysis on systemic, institutional racism.
3. It is important to note that who belongs to the group of "people of color" has changed over time. Fluidity of membership in this Other category provides some evidence of the social constructedness of race. For instance, the Irish, Italians, and Jews were not always "white," although in the U.S. people descended from these ethnic groups would be considered "white." See Ignatiev (1995) and Brodtkin (1998).
4. Other campus-wide efforts include curricular reform (funded through a Bush Foundation grant) and focused academic programs (funded by the Mellon Foundation and the Hughes Foundation), among others. This year Macalester College is engaged in long-term planning for future directions of multicultural affairs on campus.
5. Although we have focused this program on students of color first, our intent in the long term is to provide mentoring for all first year students.

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**Sedric McClure**, is Multicultural Counselor and Interim Director of the Council for Multicultural Affairs Office at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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