

August 31, 2011

## The Writing Center

The Writing Center emerged from a comprehensive study of Bakersfield College's developmental education programs three years ago, undertaken by a team led by Dr. Hunter Boylan from the National Center for Developmental Education. That study, colloquially known as "the Boylan Report" and funded by Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) money, engaged multiple stakeholders, interviews, review of available data, and an in-depth look at "basic skills" across our campus. One of the most consistent recommendations throughout that report was that BC begin steps towards a comprehensive Writing Center.

In late 2010/early 2011, the Basic Skills Team, a group founded when the BSI funding originated some three years ago, met to prioritize plans for budgeting the BSI funding. Much of the discussion centered on recommendations made in the Boylan Report, as well as input, ideas, and data analysis from a second report, "DE @ BC," undertaken with leadership from the new Dean in October, 2010. Again, the idea of a Writing Center, along with diagnostic/modularized learning, and Supplemental Instruction, were at the top of that list.

Beginning a Writing Center was a significant challenge, not only in terms of getting something with such magnitude off the ground, but also in the face of significantly reduced BSI funding for the 2011-2012 AY. A core team was brought together over the summer to work towards the goal of opening the Writing Center in fall, 2011. This team worked through many logistics, such as who would undertake the day-to-day organization and direction of the project, what was the mission, who would be our "writing consultants/professional tutors," what diagnostic/modularized software programs were "out there," working well – with reliable data and statistics – and could we do a pilot – and, if so, who would be part of that pilot, and so forth.

Data informed our decision-making at every step of the way. We identified a problematic "English developmental" sequence in our ENGL 50/60 and ENSL 50/60 courses that had showed a "flatline" to success rates over the past five years, with success percentages below the average for English/ENSL courses and the college's overall success rate averages. Clearly, here was a need for intervention. As a result, we worked in partnership with Pearson to begin our "Pearson pilot" diagnostic and modularized learning program with a sample of students in those identified classes and an action plan goal of improving success in those courses by 10-15% by the end of the 2011-2012 AY.

We also looked at data to inform our decisions about past programs and initiatives. One set of data in particular indicated that an approach we had been using for at least two years was not having the kind of impact or effect that would justify its expense, and so that was discontinued. Another set of data led to the conclusions and recommendations that our approach to implementing Supplemental Instruction needed to be different – and, as a result, we have modified that approach and plan to implement those modifications, hopefully in the spring 2012 semester. We will carefully monitor the data to ensure that we have a way to assess and authentically respond to bona fide questions such

as “is it working” – and, “if not, what can we do to make it better?”

One of the best parts of using data regularly to inform decisions and to help regulate and monitor directions taken is that when it comes time to providing a report back to the State as to how taxpayers’ money has been spent, reports and statistics are readily at hand! There is also a reassuring sense of authenticity to be able to say: “we tried x, y was the result, and we are now – based on that information – going to move towards z.”

The Writing Center Team is very excited that a project that was recommended three years ago by a national authority on Developmental Education is becoming a reality at Bakersfield College. What has given it a very strong start is a wonderful team of dedicated faculty and staff, and a bedrock of authentic assessment practices on which to build for it a wonderful future