Salt Lake City College

Testing Services Program Review

Site Visit Team Report

May 1, 2012

Introduction

After having reviewed a very thorough and well written self study document the team visited Salt Lake City College (SLCC) April 12 and 13, 2012. Interviews were conducted with various staff, faculty, and students across the three major sites. Team members were:

> Barbara Grover, Assistant Provost for Institutional Effectiveness, SLCC;
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> Tracey Smith, Director, Testing Services, Weber State University;
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> Ronald Gordon, Retired Director, Research and Assessment, Yuba Community College District, California; team leader.

The team gave an oral report April 13, 2012. This report constitutes a summary of our findings and recommendations as appropriate to improve the program.

Impressions

Team members were impressed with the quality of the self study report. Our findings agree almost entirely with the conditions described in the report.

The Director of Testing Services is highly respected throughout the college as a professional who is a team player and a willing contributor. Any negative feedback about the program was couched in specific statements of respect for the Director.

Having an academic advisor situated in the testing center is innovative and student centered. The close relationship between Testing Services and Academic Advising, particularly at the Redwood and SAT sites supports the student centered goals of the service.

The Director's involvement in Concurrent Enrollment has helped make the SLCC concurrent enrollment program the most ambitious effort in the state.

We found the college sites to be warm, inviting, friendly environments. Facilities are clean and well maintained. The students, faculty, and staff we interviewed were willing contributors who provided both positive and negative feedback.

In discussing our findings, we found we were able to categorize the issues or weaknesses into three basic themes: Budget, Training and organization, and Communication. The following report will address each of those themes as appropriate.

Department Mission, Goals, and Outcomes

The department's mission and goals are well stated and supported by action. The issues around ". . . a secure and welcoming environment . . ." will be addressed in another section. The self study aligns the program well with college and Student Services goals.

Programs and Services

Strengths

The department provides a set of core programs as defined in its mission. Resources, both physical and fiscal, have forced the department to reduce the classroom testing service significantly, but the service continues to support students. We find the array of services to be adequate for SLCC students' needs.

The department provides test preparation workshops available to students throughout the year.

Weaknesses

Communication

The array of services is not well communicated to the college community. We found several instances of other departments not being aware of testing policies, and several instances of Testing Center staff not being aware of enrollment and other policies and procedures.

Having three sites does support students' needs well, but the conflict of two different testing facilities in different departments at the South City campus creates confusion for students and tension for staff. The plan to consolidate the SAT Testing Center with Testing Services should alleviate that issue.

Faculty indicate dissatisfaction with the placement test and resulting placements. We could find no evidence of any research having been done to validate cut scores, except a study based on grades done by the test publisher. We could establish that the current cut scores were set by

faculty, but there is no evidence that they have been reviewed through empirical research. This, again, points to an issue of communication between departments.

The test preparation workshops are rather rigidly scheduled and may not be available to many students.

Testing staff at Jordan do not always know whether a student is entitled to accommodations, and often provide them without authorization because the student insists and they worry about ADA compliance.

Training/organization

Having two sites providing GED testing seems to be duplication of effort. In addition, evidence was presented that the GED service at the South City SAT center has been compromised and may not be in compliance with state regulations and security requirements. There was testimony that access codes for GED results have been given over the telephone, which is strictly prohibited by both GED and federal (FERPA) regulations. Although the State GED Coordinator has indicated that students should be able to take GED section retests at the site at which they originally tested, the South City SAT center does not allow GED retests.

Recommendations

Hold regular meetings among the various departments concerned with student enrollment and matriculation to help create smooth flow for students through the process. Students should not need to go to the Testing Center, then return to Enrollment Services for their Identification Number, then return to Testing. Regular meetings could help to communicate these flaws in the interconnectivity of the services offered.

Use brochures and other material to ensure that the services offered by Testing Services and their locations are well known across the college.

Continue with the plan to consolidate the SAT Testing Center under the Testing Services umbrella. In keeping with that, consolidate all GED testing in the Redwood site where it can be closely supervised and retest can be offered according to state protocols. Care should be taken in the consolidation to ensure that students are not forced to travel between centers needlessly.

Conduct research based on a consequential validity model to establish appropriate cut scores for all disciplines. Although it is beyond the scope of our responsibilities as a site visit team, we would be remiss if we did not report that the two team members familiar with testing services and the ACCUPLACER program noticed that the current cut scores at SLCC, as published January, 2012, are 10 to 15 points lower than any they have observed after appropriate validation research.

Examine the test preparation workshop schedule to see if a variety of times and days/evenings could be offered to provide access for more students.

Improve communication between DRC and Testing Services so proper accommodations are provided but the service is not abused, and train staff accordingly.

Leadership and Staffing

Strengths

The Director does a good job of providing leadership for the department. She appears to have the necessary skills, and certainly demonstrates the will and enthusiasm to lead a complex department such as Testing Services. She is highly respected throughout the college.

The full-time staff appear to be well versed in their immediate responsibilities. Employees are assigned specific responsibilities, but support all testing functions when needed. Full-time staff are loyal to the director. Several are relatively long term employees.

The South City site appears to have adequate staffing and excellent customer service.

Weaknesses

Communication

Communication is lacking at all sites, although the South City site does seem to work well with the SAT site at that campus. The supervisor at Jordan Valley Testing Center reported to a Disabled Resource Center (DRC) staff member that the cameras in the DRC testing room were not connected and students were testing unproctored. The South Region Director at Jordan, in an interview, indicated that she was unaware that the cameras were not working.

Training/organization

The Director is required to spend too much of her time working at the detail level, doing such work as transferring scores to other institutions, receiving scores from other institutions, and dealing with issues that should be delegated to staff.

There is strong evidence that customer service is inconsistent at best, and lacking in many respects. The issue of students being forced to return to Enrollment Services for their Identification Number is an example. Students reported that they were not informed that an academic advisor was on site. Only one of four students at Redwood reported that the testing experience was positive and supportive.

The Jordan Valley site does not have an authoritative supervisor. Staff do not seem to recognize the authority of the part time person appointed to supervise the center. Again, service is inconsistent.

There is not a committee that is charged with advising Testing Services. The Enrollment Services Committee is charged with covering Testing Services among its broad range of responsibilities, but membership does not necessarily include anyone from Testing Services.

Recommendations

Develop a comprehensive training program for new staff and an in-service program for existing staff. Provide new staff with training materials, and hold training sessions at least annually with emphasis on communication and customer service. Cross train staff to fill in for or assist other staff when necessary. Ensure that training is consistent across all sites and services. Staff must be trained to recognize problems and inadequacies in the process and report them as necessary.

Develop a manual with detailed procedures for each service the department provides. These could be contained in an overall Testing Services policy and procedures manual.

Provide performance evaluations and feedback for all staff, including part-time. They often are students' only contact with the department. The Director must be assured that they are delivering services according to service policies and procedures.

Re-organize leadership by adding either a supervisor for the Redwood center, or an Assistant Director position to free the Director from detail-level responsibilities.

Hire a full-time supervisor for the Jordan Valley site.

Re-institute the Testing Services Committee to provide a forum for communication between testing services, faculty, and other users of the service. In addition, ensure that Testing Services is represented on the Enrollment Services Committee.

Financial Resources and Budget

Resources essential to fulfillment of the mission should be included in the budget. The department is capable of creating limited revenue for itself, but funding for ACCUPLACER test units is not adequate. The director is forced to spend time locating funding outside the budget to provide this essential resource, without which a vital service to students would stop.

Providing additional testing services such as professional certifications and national tests could be a source of revenue for the department. However, those services already are provided by area

institutions. The competition would limit the amount of revenue gained. In addition, the additional staff and technical and physical resource requirements could overload the available facilities.

Recommendations

Re-examine the budget process to ensure that resources essential to the fulfillment of the mission are funded. Although some staff funding could be based on the revenue generated from GED testing, care must be taken to ensure that adequate staff will be available to perform services essential to the mission.

Use caution in considering addition of commercial testing services. Ensure that the projected revenue gain is accurate and adequate in consideration of competitive services in the area.

Facilities, Equipment and Technology

Strengths

Redwood seems to have adequate space for its services. The facilities are clean and well lighted. Although some of the technical and other equipment has been handed down from other departments, it appears to be adequate and well maintained. Having a technology specialist on board is helpful and supportive. For the most part, security is adequate. Nearly all testing locations are observed through windows and video surveillance.

All sites seem to have adequate computer and furniture resources. Surveillance is good at South City.

Weaknesses

Communication

The facilities at Redwood are located outside the normal enrollment path and may be difficult for students to find. A hand-made sign on the stair railing points toward the center, but other signage is quite limited. Students reported a "dungeon" feeling in the center. The facilities need a facelift inside and out.

At Redwood and Jordan, testing facilities are located in different buildings from Academic Advising. Again, students must move between buildings to contact necessary enrollment services. Some staff still are advising students to go downstairs to see an advisor.

Testing facilities at South City are adequate for placement testing, but no other testing services can be provided. Staff at South City must fax test scores and other documents to other institutions, even when the request comes in e-mail format.

Training/organization

Jordan Valley Testing Center is inadequate as it is designed. It does not meet specifications for good testing practices as stated by most testing guidelines. Video surveillance is provided for the main testing room, but part of it is not covered. Staff must enter the testing room to get into and out of the control room, thus disturbing any students who are testing. Staff sometimes jump over a counter to avoid disturbing students, creating a safety issue and poor decorum.

A Disabled Resource Center testing room is located inside the Jordan facility, with access only through the main testing room. Although WEB cameras are installed, they are not connected. There is no window in the facility except that in the door, so tests are administered unporoctored.

Recommendations

Examine plans and timelines for testing facilities at Redwoods. If it can be done expediently, give the current facilities a coat of paint and some appropriate decorations to reduce the "dungeon" feel. Provide adequate signage to make the facility easier to find.

As the merger of the SAT and Testing Services becomes reality, examine resources so adequate facilities can be provided with services centralized. Consider adding classroom testing, and at least make-up testing facilities. Although technical resources seem adequate at South City, the addition of a scanner would save staff time when transferring scores reports to other institutions.

Jordan Valley staff need to have access to the control area from outside the testing room. This could be accomplished by installing a tip-up slot in the counter near the exit door

Add sufficient cameras to cover the entire testing room.

Discontinue use of the DRC testing room at Jordan Valley until the facility can be remodeled to provide adequate proctoring and access. As the testing facility is remodeled, consider adding an academic advising office.

Legal and Ethical Responsibilities

Strengths

The Director is acutely knowledgeable about current regulations and good testing practices. Lead staff at all sites seem to be aware of their responsibilities to administer tests appropriately. This was particularly evident among the staff responsible for the GED testing at Redwood.

Weaknesses

Training/organization

There is evidence that part time staff may not be as aware of responsibilities as they should be. Students reported some laxity in explaining the testing process and results. This seems particularly evident at the Jordan Valley facility, but students at Redwood also reported deficiencies. Failure to provide adequate information to students is, at best, an ethical violation of good practices, and could have legal implications.

Although it is not yet part of Testing Services, we must report some legal issues connected with the SAT testing center at South City. The release of any test results without absolute verification of identity is a direct violation of stated GED policies, as well as a violation of federal law.

Recommendations

Ensure that all staff are trained well in the legal and ethical aspects of their responsibilities.

Script the introductory briefing to students so that all staff deliver the same information in the same manner, and to ensure that all necessary information is delivered.

Assessment and Evaluation

Strengths

The department has met Student Services requirements for annual assessment plans. It provides feedback to high schools on placements of their students. It has done some evaluation of the test preparation workshops.

Weaknesses

Communication

There is no evidence of support from Institutional Research for outcome evaluations.

One of the outcomes of placement testing is course placements. There was no evidence presented, other than faculty anecdotal testimony, that placements have been examined for accuracy. Although faculty express some dissatisfaction, the issue is not being discussed in a "find the solution" mode.

Recommendations

Re-institute the Testing Services Committee to support not only providing services, but to examine their results in terms of student outcomes.

Provide some research resources so empirical evidence of results can be gathered and examined, and so academic cut scores can be appropriately set and validated.