



POLICY STATEMENT

Higher Education Faculty and Staff Working in Learning Assistance-Related Fields

TOPIC: Learning Assistance

General Statement: Postsecondary faculty and staff working in learning assistance-related fields (e.g., academic support, tutoring/mentoring, disability support, remediation, developmental education) strongly endorse the need for increased funding in postsecondary for learning assistance programs to ensure student success.

Specifically, that:

- Learning assistance has become interwoven with American ideals about college success, college access, and educational equity so that the terms are often synonymous.
- Tutoring, the main component of most learning assistance programs, has been incorporated in higher education since Harvard first opened its doors in 1636. Individualized learning allows students to move forward after concepts become clear, making it one of the most successful student retention initiatives on college campuses.
- Learning assistance programs have a powerful cultural heritage and imperative as exemplified by the Civil Rights, Women’s Rights, and Disability Rights Movements.
- Learning assistance programs have grown over the past several decades to meet the needs of the increased diversity of students in higher education, at both public and private postsecondary institutions.
- There are approximately 2,500 learning assistance centers in U.S. colleges and universities [extrapolated from Sullivan, L. (1979). *Sullivan’s guide to learning assistance*. Portsmouth, NH: Entelek]. Institutional research supports the positive impact of learning assistance programs on student success compared to more recent initiatives targeting sub-populations such as athletes and first-year students.
- The unequal competition for students at postsecondary schools has created an artificial hierarchy of value, with some students being valued more than other students in the American higher education system. Learning assistance serves as an equity lever and helps all institutions accommodate the appropriate numbers of students.
- Learning assistance has a rich pedagogical history consistent with the best educational research. Learning assistance programs often pilot innovative pedagogy before it is adopted in the mainstream and should be rewarded for risk-taking in an age of accountability where “business as usual” is unacceptable.
- Learning assistance has experienced budget cuts when, in fact, it should be one of the highest institutional priorities, since it impacts all students by directly supporting them in their courses and allowing them to pass, be retained, and graduate. Budgets should be increased so that services directly reach more students.

- Learning assistance makes a difference in college student retention. Unless we dramatically improve college graduation rates, we will have a shortfall of 5 million college graduates by 2018 [Canevale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2010, June). *Help wanted: Projection of jobs and education requirements through 2018*. Washington, DC: Center of Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University].

Therefore: Organizations representing faculty and staff affiliated with learning assistance in higher education support increased funding to learning assistance initiatives, especially in comparison to less effective programs, and positioning learning assistance as a higher-education imperative.