SABBATICAL REPORT
Summer 2017 Sabbatical: 5/15/17 – 8/15/17
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Introduction and Background:
I originally submitted a sabbatical proposal in December 2015, for a Summer 2016 sabbatical. However, this proposal was not considered due to a technicality – it was submitted 45 days less than six months before the proposed start date. I resubmitted a revised proposal for Summer 2017, and it was approved. A sincere mahalo to Leeward Community College for extending this opportunity to me for professional and personal renewal.

Two months before submitting the second proposal, I found myself facing a recurrence of ovarian cancer. In Fall 2016, I had surgery, followed by six weeks of recuperation, and in Spring 2017, I underwent weekly chemotherapy treatments for nearly the entire semester. During this time, I continued to work full time. Although I felt generally healthy, working and dealing with treatments, tests, and multiple medical appointments was certainly draining. While working throughout my chemo was satisfying in many ways, I often wished for more time to exercise, prepare healthy food, and just rest. By the time summer came, the opportunity for the revitalization that is one of the purposes of a sabbatical had become especially important to me. My sabbatical enabled me to address these personal, health-related needs more fully, and helped to rejuvenate me for effective work performance in the next academic year. (It may also be worth noting that my sabbatical, occurring in summer when the LRC offers very limited services and no replacement was necessary, incurred no cost to the College.)

When I wrote my sabbatical proposal, I realized that research can sometimes take one in unanticipated directions; it included the following note: Even when conducting focused research, I believe it is important to be open to exploring avenues of inquiry and discoveries that were not necessarily part of the original plan. Accordingly, it is possible that this research will also yield unanticipated products. As it happened, both my personal circumstances and results of my research led to some changes of direction from my original purpose.

A cancer diagnosis is often a spur to reflection; by the time my sabbatical began, I was beginning to consider how much longer I wanted to work. My decision to retire at the end of the next academic year (2017-18) influenced my sabbatical activities. Although I had intended to seek a new program to implement or make major changes in an existing LRC program, this seemed less feasible since I didn’t expect to be in the LRC much longer to carry it through.

This report covers the goals I had originally set for my sabbatical, and how both the goals and the product of the sabbatical evolved.

SABBATICAL GOAL 1: Research additional options or models for peer-led group learning activities/programs (This was my principal goal.)
One way to find out what other colleges were doing that I might want to adopt was to ask. Accordingly, I rejoined the Open Forum for Learning Assistance Professionals listserv (LRNASST-
L), a large professional list (around 2000+ members) which I had subscribed to in the past and found useful, albeit time-consuming to follow. My repeated inquiries to the list about group-oriented learning activities yielded just one response, from a college that used Supplemental Instruction (SI). The LRC tried SI in the early 2000s with some success (and a full-time grant-funded faculty member running it), but it requires a high level of organization and dedicated professional and student staff, and our administration had deemed it too costly to continue. I also did numerous online searches in various databases (ERIC, EBSCO Host, etc.) seeking other models for group activities or programs. The most useful model was Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL). This program originated at the University of Minnesota, led by David Arendale who was previously one of the originators of SI. It’s similar in that it focuses on high-risk courses (with low success rates) and uses many of the same techniques, e.g., regularly scheduled out-of-class sessions facilitated by a fellow student who has previously taken the course. Also similar to SI, PAL involves extensive training of student facilitators and regular meetings with the supervisor/trainer; and the amount of organization, staffing, and paid time involved would make this program, like SI, a complex and high-cost one to implement.

Although the PAL model didn’t seem really practical for the LRC at this time, I was able to obtain the Guide for Peer Assisted Learning, and when I read through it, I found quite a few useful ideas, some of which I incorporated in my fall and spring two-day tutor orientation and training sessions. These included tips for effective listening skills, communication in a group, and discussion probes, as well as specific strategies for helping students with content areas like science and humanities.

In sum, I discovered fewer models for peer-led group learning than I had anticipated, and none that would seem feasible to implement at Leeward without a substantial increased investment in professional staff, time, and student help funding.

**SABBATICAL GOAL 2: Research alternative ways to assess the effectiveness of peer tutoring.** *(This was my secondary goal.)*

After years of assessing the effectiveness of peer tutoring based primarily on course grades, I was hoping to find some additional or alternative ways to do it. Using course grades as the main measure of tutoring success is always problematic, as countless other variables can affect this result: motivation and interest in the course, as well as personal factors such as health, finances, family issues, and work schedule. In search of ideas, I listened to a series of five podcasts on Program Evaluation from TRPP Associates and took notes on them. Honestly, I didn’t learn much; the information in the podcasts was quite basic. I also searched for articles on assessing tutoring and didn’t find many: one article compared results with no tutoring, human tutoring, and “intelligent tutoring systems” (computer tutoring). It was a review of previous research studies between 1975 and 2010, done by a professor of Computing, Informatics and Decision Systems Engineering. The human tutors were adult professionals, not peer tutors as we use here. The conclusion was that computer tutoring was more effective than human tutoring. Obviously this was not a result I wanted to see, but given the methodology, it also didn’t seem relevant to the LRC.
I did find an article with some useful insights. *Assessment of Learning Assistance Programs: Supporting Professionals in the Field* included a number of interesting points, such as the following excerpted items (my emphasis added):

- **Not every assessment needs to be done every semester:** perhaps satisfaction surveys from clients are gathered during specified weeks of a semester, faculty focus groups can occur every other year, SI will be assessed in the final weeks of a semester, and study strategies workshops are assessed in the first 3 weeks of a semester. ... The idea is to create a full, mixed-methods, multi-year approach to assessment that permits ongoing critical inquiry without interruption to learning assistance programs and services.

- **Learning assistance should respond to the current trend of outcomes assessment.** Direct measures of student learning outcomes (SLOs) are now required practice for assessment, and as such they must be addressed. A **learning outcome may be so specific that it can be measured after a single tutorial session or workshop attendance, or it may encompass a semester of student participation.** Learning assistance professionals need to examine services in order to find the possible specific measures that can be gathered and summarized quantitatively.

- **Learning assistance should continue to utilize qualitative assessments.** Even as the emphasis increases for quantitative direct measures of student learning, the learning assistance profession must not ignore the realms of compassion, self-efficacy, and student confidence that qualitative study can reveal about the positive—and often measurable—impacts of learning assistance services. Other outcomes need to be considered as well, such as the **retention gains for the student peer tutors and mentors** who provide learning assistance and the demonstrations of quality and best practices possible through criterion-referenced assessment processes. (Norton and Agee 14)

After years of suffering through the mostly quantitative, sometimes seemingly arbitrary measures mandated by the system ARPD, I particularly appreciate the authors’ recognition of the value of qualitative measures. Furthermore, after working with tutors for 27 years, I firmly believe that tutoring contributes as much to the development of peer tutors as it does to the success of the students they support. I also believe that many of the benefits of tutoring to both tutor and student can be identified and assessed qualitatively. In addition to the existing feedback surveys of LRC users, **the use of other qualitative assessments of both students who access tutoring and the tutors themselves is certainly an area worth exploring.**

**Other avenues of inquiry:** Before my sabbatical, I spoke with some faculty about my sabbatical plan and asked them for input; several expressed an interest in increased online tutoring for their students. While the LRC has offered SKYPE tutoring in various subjects for years, and has publicized it along with our face-to-face tutoring, this service has been seldom utilized. Perhaps, I thought, SKYPE was not the best vehicle for this service. Accordingly, I decided to check out a different platform: I arranged a training session with Rachael Inake of the Educational Media Center on Blackboard Collaborate. I appreciated Rachael’s time, but after reflecting on the session, determined that this software was far too complex for our purposes, particularly given
the infrequency of online tutoring requests. The appointment process would not interface easily with our existing system and overall, there seemed to be too many technical details for tutors to remember, such as turning off the webcam if things are loading slowly, recording the session and stopping the recording at the end, steps for sharing apps, and so on. So for the time being, we have stayed with SKYPE.

**CONCLUSION:** In the end, given the results of my research and my decision to retire, I determined that the most valuable action I could take was, going forward, to document as much of existing LRC programs and practices as possible, to attempt to leave clear “footprints” for the next coordinator to follow until she (or he) sets her/his own direction. Accordingly, I spent a good deal of time creating this body of material, and saved everything in a Google Drive under a UH departmental email account I established. It contains fourteen informational documents including a very detailed *Overview of the LRC* and a *Semester Cycle*, as well as 12 email templates for regularly used subjects (e.g., announcing availability of LRC tutors to faculty). I hope that this record will be helpful to the next person and that it will serve as a small legacy of my 27 very satisfying and, I hope, productive years in the Learning Resource Center at Leeward Community College.

Works Cited


