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UW Tacoma Learning Commons Proposal:

University of Washington Tacoma, Learning Commons Task Force

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Learning Commons Task Force

Background Information

Charge

The Learning Commons Task Force will develop a comprehensive and integrated vision for the UW Tacoma Learning Commons, thinking broadly and creatively about how best to enhance the student experience to maximize student persistence and success. The Task Force will consider how to integrate technology, support, and consultative services in a central and seamless learning environment for all members of the UW Tacoma community as a source of information resources and assistance.

The Task Force is charged to envision a transformative, impactful, and integrated physical space that puts learning, discovery, and creative works at its core. The Task Force includes representatives from units across campus and will produce a document outlining guiding principles that are aligned with the UW Tacoma mission and strategic plan. Student and faculty focus groups will vet the document during the Autumn Quarter.

Members

- Serin Anderson, Collections and Budget Librarian, Library
- Tim Bostelle, Head, Library Information Technology, Library
- Colleen Carmean, Assistant Chancellor, Academic Innovation
- Dwayne Chambers, Associate Director, Quantitative Center, TLC
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- Kathleen Farrell, Director, Student Planning and Administration, Student and Enrollment Services
- Jamal Gabobe, Media and Visual Resources Technician, Library
- Suzanne Klinger, Head, Reference Services, Library
- Kathleen Monks, Head, Instruction Services, Library
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- Jill Purdy, Interim Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
- Elizabeth Sundermann, Faculty, School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences
- Hannah Wilson, Access Services Manager, Library

Campus Learning Commons

An intentionally designed, central, and accessible Learning Commons is necessary to prepare students for emerging modes of information literacy, academic inquiry, and knowledge creation. As research and writing processes evolve to be more integrated and cyclic, academic consultants and reference librarians must also integrate their services and spaces. Though cross-departmental collaboration has begun UW Tacoma does not yet have a space that would support this integrated service model. A Learning Commons would provide centralized and collaborative services and space in the same place, resulting in a transformative experience for UW Tacoma students.

Terminology

Identifying a term to describe a Learning Commons for UW Tacoma has been a challenging process. The committee would like to recommend utilizing student focus groups to determine a name or phrase that is self-evident to the primary audience.

For the purposes of this document, we will use the industry-term “Learning Commons” for the spaces, resources, and services we are describing.

Mission

The Learning Commons intentionally integrates academic support and technology in a campus hub that maximizes student persistence and success.

Vision

The Learning Commons is a transformative nexus for UW Tacoma which provides high-level services and technology-rich, flexible spaces to connect learners at every level.

Historical Context

The Learning Commons initiative has grown out of several previous, informal efforts to co-locate and coordinate space and services to better support the UW Tacoma community. Historically, organizational structures, space, and a lack of a coherent vision for student experience have constrained this work. Most recently, the realization that writing, research, technology, and sometimes quantitative reasoning are not separate parts of scholarly work, but rather are integrated across the same project, has spurred momentum to realize an intentional campus learning commons.

In addition to these services, space design and implementation have also evolved across units. The campus has built comfortable niche spaces around campus and continues to do so. These spaces, found in buildings across campus, allow students to work and interact between classes, but are currently small, decentralized, and do not support a cohesive academic community. By contrast, the Learning Commons will purposefully integrate spaces with services, resources, and technology to support student success.

One of the earliest iterations of a UW Tacoma commons began when the Library modernized its technology infrastructure in 2001, moving toward a more full-service research space where students could research and write their papers. When the Tioga Library Building came online in 2012, the Library moved most of the books out of the Snoqualmie Building and through the generosity of the campus administration, we were able to renovate both floors of the Snoqualmie building, turning the old library into a technology-friendly student work space. The renovation of Snoqualmie expanded and centralized the Teaching and Learning Center. They brought with them all of their student computers and the Library and TLC jointly created what is now known as the LARC or Learning and Research Commons. In 2016, Academic Technology funded student positions to work in the LARC as well, providing technology support to students in the space.

Alignment with Campus Strategic Priorities

The proposed Learning Commons will be a central means of addressing the strategic priority to “advance student success academically, professionally and personally.” The Student impact goal states that “Educating learners is why we exist” as a university and that we must provide a **“range and depth of support for students”** and high-quality **“experiences available outside the classroom.”** The Learning Commons will centralize these goals in a space that both supports the teaching and learning occurring within classrooms and cultivates extra-curricular community engagement that invites students to remain on campus outside of class time.

Currently, there are few open student-centered spaces on the UWT campus that encourage extra-curricular student-to-student and student-to-faculty contact. Research on persistence and retention, however, points to the centrality of this kind of contact in creating a sense of belonging for students on campuses. Moreover, a synthesis of Kuh’s High-Impact Practices (practices that are shown to increase student retention and success across backgrounds) shows that HIPs generally include frequent and significant contact with faculty and peers, contact with material in active-learning and culturally-diverse settings, continuous feedback, and integration and application of knowledge (Boquet & Lerner, 2016). At UWT currently, it is difficult for students to make that kind of contact with faculty and peers outside of classrooms and to practice active-learning due to the configuration of our campus.

Furthermore, the Learning Commons vision we articulate here fulfills several key success indicators of achieving the **Student** impact goal:

- A. strengthen persistence to graduation
- C. increase use and assessment of HIPs
- D. support teaching excellence and continuous improvement in teaching
- E. demonstrate continuous improvement in student learning

F. increase student awareness of and satisfaction with the availability and accessibility of UW Tacoma resources, support, and infrastructure.

In addition to deeper and wider application of HIPs and strengthening student persistence, the Learning Commons would directly increase the availability and accessibility of resources, support, and infrastructure, while also sparking continuous improvement in student learning.

The Learning Commons will also achieve the **Scholarship** impact goal. Broadly defined, this goal encapsulates “discovery, integration, application, and teaching and learning.” Much student work at UWT can be described as publicly engaged scholarship. The Learning Commons would both support this work in more visible and seamless ways as well as curate it, both physically and digitally. In addition, it would enhance the efforts to share exceptional student work through UW Tacoma Digital Commons by providing students training and development opportunities that engaged with the entire life cycle of knowledge creation. Therefore, the Learning Commons would help UWT fulfill success indicator B, to “increase the visibility of scholarship and creative pursuits.”

In the same vein, the **Culture** impact goal urges our campus to be respectful, productive, and inclusive. While our students are currently productive, many say that the campus does not feel inclusive; some have commented that the high-quality academic side of UWT feels separate from efforts toward student engagement and that they rarely interact with either faculty or peers outside of classes. Others have said that it’s difficult to find a reason to stay on campus outside of class due to lack of inviting space and a specific reason to be here. The Learning Commons would bridge academic productivity and inclusivity, reifying the academic community both physically and socially. The Learning Commons would thus connect students to the “ethic of continuous learning” that this indicator aims for and hopefully “improve the satisfaction of faculty, staff, and students with the quality of relationships on campus” (success indicators D and E).

Finally, the strategic plan invites grounding in social justice in the **Equity** impact goal. Increasing and improving access to support services, technology, and infrastructure for all our students--including students of color, first-generation students, students living in poverty, veterans, parents, students with disabilities, and students marginalized in other ways--is one central means to furthering social justice and equity in education at UWT. Consistent and high-quality support services (such as tutoring, writing groups, and research instruction) have been shown to close gaps in academic achievement as well as improve student confidence and ultimately their satisfaction with their education (success indicators D and A). Although high-quality support services do already exist at UWT, coordinating them within a seamless and central environment would likely increase both student use and student satisfaction with both the services and with their education in general and do more to close achievement disparities. Ultimately, by increasing the retention and persistence of marginalized students, the Learning Commons would help UWT achieve part of its social justice mission.

Integration of Services

The key feature of a Learning Commons will be the integration of services that support student success and retention. In addition to space features that don't currently exist, the services will be intentionally designed and located to foster collaboration and transcend departmental division. The Task force has established that the Library, TLC, and Academic Technologies should build a first phase of an integrated service model, though the specifics of that model should be determined by the experts responsible for offering these services. A group should convene in Spring 2018 to begin determining this model.

- a. Workshops and drop-in for both students and faculty
- b. Integrated student support through scheduled consultations and/or drop in
- c. Faculty development through consultations, workshops, and learning communities.
- d. Capacity to host "just in time" support services such as financial aid, advising, etc

Space

The learning commons should be central, flexible, and secure. The Learning Commons should be centrally located to increase visibility and accessibility to students. The Learning Commons should provide a sense of safety for students, technology, and resources. Space should be designed to be adaptable and consider emerging campus needs. A wide variety of needs will be met in the learning commons, but there are some physical spaces/services in high demand by students:

- Closed collaborative study rooms (with supported technology)
- Closed individual study (with or without technology)
- Closed presentation practice rooms (with supported technology)
- Technology labs with expert support
- Open study areas, both individual and collaborative
- Consultation space to meet with experts (which may vary seasonally)
- Lockers or individual, reservable, study carrels
- Makerspace with expert support
- Dining options and casual seating
- Office space for staff
- Small to medium sized workshop spaces
- Large presentation room (which could also hold campus events)
- Instruction lab (independently managed by the Learning Commons)

The library collections (books, media, equipment, and other learning materials) should have a footprint in the commons, with a potential additional benefit as a way to divide up space or create sound barriers. Both technology and library materials in the space would require a security bubble that filters users through monitored entrances and exits. This filtering would allow us to create service/information desks at entrance points to help direct students through the learning commons.

Units such as Library Reference, Library IT, Academic Technologies and the TLC will need permanent physical space in the commons, with enough of a footprint to accommodate their services, but other space can be made available to seasonal partners. Many campus departments could offer services outside their normal operation hours or at peak times within the commons.

The commons hours should be dictated by student need. The ability to section off parts of the commons such as study areas and computer labs would allow expanded hours of operation at certain times.

Technology and Digital Scholarship

The Learning Commons will need to provide access to technologies and services that support the curriculum, student projects, and informal learning. Access to technologies levels the playing field for students, ensuring all UW Tacoma students have equitable access to the tools they need to succeed now and in the future. In addition to technologies, students need access to support and consultative services to enable them to utilize the technologies most effectively.

Initial technologies to consider for the Learning Commons:

1. Maker space – 3D printers and computers for 3D design
2. Data visualization studio (GIS, SPSS)
3. Accessibility stations
4. Scanners: both 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional
5. Digital interactive signage

Spaces:

- Collaborative workstations
- Dual monitors and desktop computers
- Labs/study spaces with laptop docking stations
- Instruction lab (seating for 50, power, data, and tablets)
- Videoconferencing booths
- Audio and video editing

Example Services to offer for the Learning Commons:

- Basic technology background (ppt, word, etc) and digital literacy
- Workshops and drop in learning

Outreach/Communication

Throughout this process the Taskforce has recognized the importance of outreach to potential users and stakeholders. Throughout the planning and implementation of the Learning Commons, we will continue to seek feedback from stakeholders across campus.

We recognize that it will be necessary to build a communication and marketing plan to raise awareness among faculty and students and will collaboratively develop this plan as we have specific offerings to share with campus.

In particular, we understand the centrality of faculty to the success of this project. The Learning Commons will offer support to faculty interested in improving their teaching as well as help their students across their academic coursework at any stage of the scholarly process.

- e. Market to faculty
 - i. Retreats
 - ii. Faculty meetings
 - iii. Student Success Council
 - iv. Deans and Directors
 - v. Connection with SAES
 - vi. Publications (newsletter, screens throughout campus, etc)
 - vii. Events (sharing scholarship, pedagogical development)
- f. Market to students
 - i. Ask faculty to help share with their students
 - ii. Incorporate information into weekly event email, as appropriate (UWT411)
 - iii. Social Media
 - iv. Campus Digital Signage
 - v. Events (social, academic)

Administration

The Learning Commons will be agile and adaptive in structure, relying on collaboration between “anchor tenants” and other participants. The aim is to be purposeful and intentional in our work rather than adding another service on top of existing opportunities. Communication amongst stakeholders and other campus partners will be key to its success.

- g. Key Stakeholders
 - i. Library
 - ii. Teaching and Learning Center
 - iii. Academic Technology
 - iv. ASUWT
 - v. Student Technology Fee Committee
 - vi. Student Activities Board
 - vii. Associate Vice Chancellor for Research
 - viii. Faculty Development Council
 - ix. Faculty Assembly and Executive Committee
 - x. Campus Planning & Real Estate
 - xi. Learning & Retention Council
 - xii. Student Success Council
- h. Other Campus Partners

- i. The University Y Student Center
- ii. IT services
- iii. Media services
- iv. Academic Deans and Directors
- v. Seasonal (“Just in time” services)
 - 1. Advising
 - 2. Career Services
 - 3. Financial aid
 - 4. Global Studies
 - 5. Campus Security
 - 6. International Students Office
 - 7. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion