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PARTNERSHIPS AT WORK. NEW GRANT… NEW PROGRAMS!

By Vicenta Shepard
Reading & Learning Coordinator
Center for Academic Success

The award of a new Title V grant by the Department of Education focuses on a High Tech - High Touch initiative that has given the Center for Academic Success another opportunity to shine. To address the needs of FIU’s Hispanic students, the College of Arts & Sciences and Undergraduate Education applied for this comprehensive federal grant to provide FIU with additional resources to enhance student success. Out of the seven components in the grant, the Center for Academic Success is involved in four of them: Activity 2, Improve the Teaching of Composition to Generation 1.5 Students; Activity 4, Improve Students’ Reading Skills; Activity 5, Enhance Tutoring Services; Activity 6, Engage an Early Alert System for First-Semester Students.

“Through these various components, multiple areas of the university can collaborate to support the academic needs of our unique student population,” states Maria Kulick, Center for Academic Success Director.

Concern by faculty that many students do not understand the readings or follow the assignment sheets given to them has led to the Reading & Learning tutors teaming up with ENC Hybrid instructors to provide “Guided Reading Sessions”. The sessions give students the opportunity to discuss sample readings as well as the assignment sheets in order to develop a solid understanding of their tasks.

A select group of math tutors are now utilizing an online approach with students who cannot physically make it to the Center. Using Adobe Connect, the math tutors are able to communicate with any FIU student who requests assistance well beyond our regular hours, and also have the ability to work with several students at the same time.

Reading speed enhancement has also moved online. Designed to improve both speed and comprehension, the Reading Plus program has gained a great deal of popularity since its introduction. The conveniences of this web-based program, along with its individualized goal-setting features, have attracted undergraduate as well as graduate students. Even some MCAT candidates have enjoyed the benefits of the program. Students make gains by increasing the number of words they read per minute while maintaining at least 80% comprehension of the passages they read.

The Center for Academic Success is proud to be part of this five-year High Tech - High Touch grant initiative, which so far is showing promise in increasing student achievement across their academic careers and is a great vessel through which new and exciting programs, geared to student success, are being piloted.

“Through these various components, multiple areas of the University can collaborate to support the academic needs of our unique student population.”

Maria Kulick,
Center Director
WHAT M.A.T.H. IS ALL ABOUT

By Ive Barreiros
Math & Statistics Coordinator
Center for Academic Success

We all know that the Center for Academic Success is dedicated to helping students excel in various aspects of their studies. With this in mind, the Center’s Math/Stat tutoring team is continuously looking for new and flexible ways to assist students. This is what M.A.T.H. is all about!

More than a cleverly crafted acronym, Moodle Assisted Tutoring Help (MATH) is at the center of exciting work being done by a dedicated team of math tutors at the BBC University Learning Center. They’ve spent the past several months working on an instrument that will assist students in many aspects of their mathematics and statistics courses.

It will provide the students who come to the ULC with notes, practice questions and simulation of quizzes and tests, in many fundamental topics from their math and stat courses. Access to the system is guaranteed when a student signs up as a participant of the ULC’s activities.

The material for the M.A.T.H. bank comes from a variety of sources; however, it is primarily the result of the codifying and cataloging of examples, exercises, notes, lists of formulas and the like, accumulated over a ten-year period. Presently the material is being evaluated, reviewed, compiled and organized by tutors Richard Munoz, Ivy Cheung and Kyle Wicomb. Math/Stats coordinator Ive Barreiros supervises the project.

While participating in M.A.T.H., the students will be notified in advance about upcoming workshops, review sessions and other special events aimed at improving their performance. The department of Educational Technology Services is also playing a critical role in the development of M.A.T.H. Rafael Perez, applications trainer, provides training, support and technical oversight with regard to design and functionality.

We think that the system will be ready to be accessed for trials toward the end of the summer semester and completely available for everybody by fall 2012. Professors, students or others interested in knowing more about M.A.T.H. are encouraged to contact the Center for Academic Success to arrange a presentation of the system.

HARVARD BOUND

Fast on the heels of the distinguished Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History fellowship which, last year, took senior Reading & Learning tutor Kimberly Lumpkin to the foothills of Boulder, Colorado, she is soon to be gone again. This time, Kim is off to take part in Harvard University’s Rhetoric and American Democracy Symposium. Kim continues to make us proud. Her dedication to her craft and to our students is without a doubt a constant in our students’ success.
WHEN IT FEELS LIKE IT’S FALLING APART, STICK TO THE PLAN

By Vicenta Shepard
Reading & Learning Coordinator

This freshman story is a familiar one: “Things are so different here than high school! Back then I didn’t have to study at all, and I still got good grades. Now, I have to read in almost every class—even the one-credit classes require so much work! This campus is huge and you’re on your own about homework and projects. Plus, I’m trying to make some extra money working...” [3 months later] Crap! I knew that Algebra class was going to mess up my GPA! No problem, I’ll take it again, and it’ll be different next time: different class time, different instructor. And I’ve got to stop going out as much this semester. I’ll tell my boss to cut my work hours, too... [4 months later] OMG! What do you mean I failed—again? I don’t know what happened! If I don’t get above a 2.0 this semester, I’m toast. AARGH! What am I gonna do?”

This scenario happens more often than we want to admit. There are many reasons why some freshmen hit the wall when they come to FIU, while others thrive. For those who do hit the wall, what we want them, and anyone else who finds him/herself in this situation, to know is this: You are not the only person going through this. There is a place where you can get help. There is a light at the end of the tunnel.

THE READING/Writing CONNECTION

By Kim Lumpkin
Senior Reading Tutor
Center for Academic Success

We all know people who seem to read and write effortlessly; however, there are two things to keep in mind: 1) it’s never effortless, and 2) with rare exceptions, those skilled readers and writers didn’t get that way without a great deal of practice. I have always enjoyed both reading and writing, but it wasn’t until I became a teacher and tutor that I realized how interconnected these seemingly divergent processes really are. One of the strategies I use to help students understand a reading passage is to have them outline it either in traditional outline form or with graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams and story maps, which of course are also used to teach writing. By creating such outlines, students are basically deconstructing the writer’s thought processes. The more I used this strategy, the more apparent it became to me that reading and writing are like flip sides of the same coin.

The link between reading and writing can also be seen when students emulate the writing style of their favorite authors. It’s no coincidence that most writers will eagerly tell you who their greatest influences are; besides inspiring them, their favorite authors also influenced their emerging styles in both large and small ways.

I’ve often had students read a variety of fables or fairy tales and then write one in the style of the story they liked best. As students, we are naturally reluctant to do such exercises on our own because we have been taught to avoid plagiarism at all costs, and with good reason. But if you’re just trying to improve your written expression, phrasing, and word choice, finding an author whose writing connects with you, and trying out a few pages in his or her style can give you a better sense of how written language works better than reading alone can.

It doesn’t have to be fiction, either— I sometimes make up articles about topics that interest me or I feel passionate about just to keep my writing varied by using different tones depending on the subject. So if you don’t have a favorite author but are a news junkie or just read a lot about a particular topic, that is another way to sharpen your writing skills without the pressure of having to make it good enough for others to see and evaluate, or forcing yourself to write personal journal entries when you’re just not feeling it.

As the information age continues to explode, good reading skills are becoming increasingly important in every field, and writing skills are fast becoming just as critical. So if you’ve never thought of improving your writing skills by reading (and writing) more, now is the time to try it!
THE CENTER CELEBRATES
STUDENT EMPLOYMENT WEEK

April 9th – 13th, 2012 will mark Student Employment Week across the institution. The Center for Academic Success celebrates its student employees who are truly the unsung heroes of the department.

This year the Center is proud to have nominated Pablo Pando and Federico Lastra for the prestigious SEOTY 2012 Awards. Pablo and Federico stand out among our many outstanding student employees for their commitment to the Center’s goals and mission. In addition, Federico and Michael Baugh will attend the 2012 Association for the Tutoring Profession (ATP) Conference in Seattle, Washington. According to Center director Maria Kulick, this serves as a continuation to our tutor training program and provides participants the opportunity to pursue individual certification as a tutoring professional.

¿HABLAS ESPAÑOL?

The Center for Academic Success has recently added Spanish tutorials and Spanish for the Hospitality Industry workshops to its repertoire, and students have flocked to the Center to sign up for the twice-weekly hour-long sessions.

For many, such as those non-Spanish speakers involved in the Hospitality industry, acquiring basic conversational skills in the language is an imperative. For others, the ability to communicate in Spanish, even at the most basic level, enhances their overall prospects as a student as well as their social lives. Some, on the other hand, use the opportunity to brush up on their skills before attempting the very popular Spanish CLEP exam.

Sessions are conducted with small to medium sized groups timed long enough to engage students and their questions, but short enough to avoid information overload. All workshops are free to currently enrolled students and are on a first come, first served basis.

Please contact the Center at 305 348-2441 or 305 919-5927 for details.