

From Leadership to Data to Improved Services

BHCC

Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) is a multi-campus urban institution, with its main campus situated in the historic Charlestown neighbourhood of Boston, Massachusetts. Founded in 1973 by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, BHCC enrolls more than 8,100 students in day, evening, weekend, web-based, and distance learning courses and programs. With students from more than 90 countries, and students of color comprising more than half of the student population, BHCC is one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan colleges in New England. The average student age is 28; nearly two-thirds are women, and the majority of all students work while attending college.

Under President Mary Fifield's leadership since 1998, the college has identified goals and objectives every three years and BHCC employees can submit action plans addressing these goals and objectives to improve services. Action plan and mini-grant processes have worked at Bunker Hill Community College to foster and promote interdisciplinary and interdepartmental collaboration focused on improving services for native and non-native English speaking students.

The key elements of these two part sessions are:

- Action Plan and Mini-Grant Processes
- Multi - Media Multi - Purpose Language Lab
- Language Institute
- Learning Communities and Integrated Courses
- Effective Master Scheduling and Improved Curriculum Development

PRESENTERS

Christopher Carter Christopher Carter is the BHCC Multi-Media Multi-Purpose Language Lab Coordinator as well as an adjunct faculty member in both the English and ESL Departments at BHCC. He has previous teaching experience at Lansing Community College and Michigan State University. Mr. Carter earned his Bachelor's degree in Chinese Language and Linguistics and Master's Degree in the Critical Studies of Teaching English from Michigan State University. His areas of research focus on issues of self-efficacy, composition and rhetoric theory, practical teaching pedagogy, second language learning, and secondary discourses.

Alessandro Massaro Professor of ESL since 1981 at BHCC: Director of the ESL/Electronics Certificate Program 1984; ESL Co-Department Chair 1987 - 1994 and Department Chair from 1996 – 2000 and 2002 – present: Specializes in developing innovative curricula to meet the academic needs of non native English speakers

Luana McCuish Professor of English since 2004 at BHCC: Reading Coordinator, 2004-present. Additional teaching experiences at North Shore Community College, Northern Essex Community College and online with Kaplan University.

Sofya Mitelman BHCC Systems Analyst 1998 - Present: Office of Institutional Assessment. Before graduating from BHCC with an Associate in Computer Programming, completed non credit and credit ESL courses: Able to understand faculty members' requests for data and generate reports to meet their needs

Diane Smith In her role as the Director of the Library and Information Center at Bunker Hill Community College, Smith is responsible for BHCC Library management and operations. Central to her work, she continues to develop two core programs that she initiated in the 90's: a Liaison Program and an Information Literacy Workshop Program. The two web-based educational support activities ensure that the library maintains an inclusive, user-focused approach to customer service while contributing to the academic success of BHCC students.

Smith was recently elected to the office of vice president/president elect of the Massachusetts Conference of Chief Librarians of Public Higher Education Institutions. As a past President of Massachusetts Women in Public Higher Education she serves on its Executive Board of and continues in a leadership role as the group's webmaster. She holds two master's degrees; one from the University of Massachusetts in Education with a focus on Instructional Design and another in Library and Information Science from Syracuse University.

ACTION PLAN and MINI-GRANT PROCESSES

An annual Long Range Planning Event at the beginning of the calendar year provides an opportunity to focus attention on specific issues and stimulate ideas for proposing new Action Plans. BHCC's unique action plan process connects planning activities directly to budget development. The Action Plan budget is part of the overall budget approved by the BHCC Board of Trustees. The Language Lab and Institute ideas had been around for a long time but lacked a mechanism to make the vision a reality.

Each year, part of the College budget is allocated for Action Plans. Base budgets for each department are designed to cover the costs of business-as-usual. Action Plan allocations, however, are intended to support new initiatives that contribute to the College's strategic plan. The projects are initiated by members of the College community in support of specific College goals and objectives. The process is competitive but initiatives that clearly address improving the academic quality for students quickly rise to the top of the list. Action Plans are submitted to executive staff for approval.

As part of its mission to support professional development at BHCC, the Teaching and Learning Center offers mini-grant funding for professional development activities for full and part-time faculty and professional staff. The Center encourages members of the community to think creatively about ways to strengthen teaching and learning throughout the College and to help BHCC meet its goals and objectives. A multi-award mini-grant proposal was designed to bring four faculty members and five library staff together in a collaborative way to move the Language Lab project forward while fostering interdisciplinary and interdepartmental partnerships on campus.

MULTI-MEDIA MULTI-PURPOSE LANGUAGE LAB

The BHCC Language Lab opened in 2005 with an action plan and has seen rapid growth. The Lab first served ESL students and students studying foreign languages, but has expanded its services to all BHCC students. The Lab allows faculty members from all disciplines to deliver lessons and/or refer students for extra structured time on task and students can work in the lab independently. “Extra structured time on task” and “Extended Instruction” are the principles behind the Lab, which recently moved to a new location, expanding both its services and the number of computer stations.

A key factor in the success of this Lab has been involving many sectors of the college including: Academic Computing, Instructional Design and Technology, Audio Visual, Faculty from various departments and Facilities. This team approach in developing the Lab has resulted in a Lab that is beneficial to all students and staff.

Lab staff members include a full-time coordinator, two full-time tutors, several part-time tutors, work study students and two ESL faculty members who receive a course release to work in the lab. Faculty members refer students and lab staff members inform faculty members within 24 – 48 hours about student attendance and work accomplished in the Lab. Lab materials include faculty authored materials, selected websites, and textbook and independent software programs. BHCC’s library hosts the website and revisions are made on a monthly basis.

The website development for lab and off campus access to online sites is where the skills and expertise of the Library & Information Center team members came into play. The development of the Language Lab website demonstrates how technology and the opportunities of the web are used to overcome, compliment, and extend the physical limitations of the campus-based Language Lab and its tutors to meet student learning needs.

During the summer of 2006, English faculty members and Lab staff researched thousands of websites. The focus was selecting useful, educational and interactive websites to benefit student learning. The research focused upon those skills and techniques taught in developmental reading and writing and college level composition. These websites are defined as tutorials and/or exercises, and students can access them via the Language Lab or online.

To ensure involvement in a range of areas and expertise, five library staff members were called upon to participate in the project. The Library Team included: Diane Smith, management and project research, Jesse Gordon, Assessment & Evaluation Librarian, Stephen Nedell, Digital Cataloger, Michael Linh Tran, Technical Assistant and Amanda Rust, ESL Liaison and Information Design Librarian.

Managing the library contributions to the project without stifling creativity or limiting the scope of individual segments often times meant letting development expand for extended periods before reigning things in to fit realistic expectations. They recognized that their tasks were not ends in themselves but contributions to an infrastructure that established a foundation for a work in progress.

The ESL Liaison and Information Design Librarian provided HTML 4.01 coding guidelines and corrections for the site. She identified usability and style guidelines that future site contributors could consult to ensure consistency as the Language Lab Web Site expands. Usability study summaries consulted for this project were taken from Jakob Nielsen's work posted on wuseit.com.

Supplying the rest of the team with page layout diagrams and an outline for a site inventory helped everyone to move forward with a single vision in mind. Identifying maintenance guidelines and methods as well as contributing a site architecture diagram helped to lessen the concerns of team members during the creative and exploratory stages of the project while moving them forward with some consistency. Her experience working with ESL students and faculty helped her to provide meaningful insights into user receptivity to the website, outline future recommendations for new resource discovery as well as new web page creation, submission, and maintenance. Online learning modules of interest in the development of this project included:

The digital cataloger was critical to organizing and making accessible the content for the project. He invested time and energy locating methods for automated site inventory and surveying learning object & Internet-based resource repositories to discover best practices in organizing and cataloging websites. He developed a cataloging structure, established a controlled vocabulary for subject headings and developed a replicable template for future cataloging of Language Lab web sites. Research showed that even though the Internet has been a commonly used tool for most of the public for almost a decade and in libraries for many years longer, there is still no one standard for producing Metadata data for Internet-based resources.

Upon completion of the initial Language Lab website, only about 30 websites were cataloged and the remaining sites were simply linked to the site. Instructions were put in place for library assistants to continue cataloging the remaining and new Language Lab websites. It was determined, however, that the remaining un-cataloged resources would likely take more than one hundred additional hours. Cataloging done by a library assistant rather than a librarian, deemed to be the only cost effective way to proceed, could easily triple the time investment made to cataloging. Even using Dublin Core, a relatively simple cataloging format, the effort of creating quality records for so many resources could prove to be too much to be worth doing.

Supporting it all was the efforts of the Project Technical Assistant whose energies went into providing full site construction, formatting, and posting of all Web site files. He implemented HTML code changes as needed and made future recommendations for development and the renaming of the site to eliminate display of the server name in the URL. Recommendations for the future development of the Language Lab site include the creation of a department blog via free service Blogger, which allows administrative ability to set viewing and posting security rules. Potential future uses could be blogs for individual classes (ENG 095, ESL 097, etc.) The blog would serve as a vehicle for new site suggestions and community building via the Language Lab web. Also, re-coding and re-deployment of the Language Lab site is essential to its continuity. The need to apply technical standards that would result in easier maintenance (full CSS compliance, dynamic link lists, etc.) can not be overstated.

Tracking student attendance and tasks completed is critical. The Lab tracks all students who visit and record the programs and websites they use via Microsoft Explorer's history log. Assessing the websites is equally important. The Assessment and Evaluation Librarian provided resources on various aspects of assessment: evaluating student activity on Language Lab web pages via analysis of web activity reports, evaluating construction and tabulation of student survey instruments to obtain student feedback, evaluating Language Lab web pages via objective standards on web accessibility and appearance, and making future recommendations for evaluating impact of Language Lab web pages in student attainment of course learning outcomes via faculty surveys. WebTrends, software that captures web file information and summarizes it for analysis and review, was put in place for routine use. Data about website activity provided by WebTrends is useful for site planning and development and provides a reliable base for making general suppositions about website use.

LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

The Language Institute began with an action plan in 2006 with the goal of leveraging the colleges' resources when it comes to providing services for non-native English speaking students. An Internal Advisory Board has been formed with representatives from twenty college departments and divisions including Assessment, Advising, Disability Services, Grant Writing and the Boston Welcome Back Center for internationally educated nurses. An External Advisory Group is being formed to provide expertise and guidance as the Institute considers developing new courses to meet community needs.

The Assessment Center is now able to conduct a more comprehensive testing and placement process for ESL students who also receive student mentors because of line items in the Institute's budget. New credit and non-credit courses have been developed with successful enrolments and future new courses may include:

- English for Health care Professionals
- English for Business Professionals
- Spanish for Health Care Workers

INTEGRATED COURSES and LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The ESL/Electronics Certificate Program, which began in 1984, and the ESL/Allied Health Certificate Program, started in 1986, have a history of 85% completion rate and 80 % job placement. The immediate goal of these programs is to employ graduates, but about 40% of the graduates eventually continue their education and earn their Associates Degree. These programs began with state and federal grant funds.

Due to the success of these programs BHCC began to offer learning communities that integrated ESL and English courses with business, computer, psychology, and sociology courses in 1998. Students who enrol in these integrated courses have a higher success rate not only for the individual courses but also in terms of retention and graduation rates. These ESL integrated courses began with mini grants and continued with action plans.

Content area faculty members and ESL faculty members receive a \$250.00 stipend each semester to coordinate curricula. They discuss and implement curriculum delivery and assimilation. The content faculty member is responsible for content and the ESL faculty member is responsible for language. The goal is to ensure that students do not depend on ESL faculty members to answer content related questions. As long as the master schedule allows, ESL courses are scheduled prior to content courses. When students ask ESL faculty members content related questions, they communicate these questions to content faculty members, who then address these questions at the beginning of their lessons.

The ESL faculty member may use the content textbook to deliver lessons in listening, speaking, reading and writing and to teach vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar in the context of the content textbook. Second language learning literature has supported for years that ESL students learn English more quickly and effectively when taught in context.

The content faculty member can supply the ESL faculty member with content driven writing prompts and students' writings are assessed for language by the ESL faculty member and for content by the content faculty member.

DATA and MASTER SCHEDULE and CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

To produce a master schedule that guarantees zero or close to zero course cancellation, the most popular sections are identified by studying enrolment patterns from when registration begins until the start of classes. With the help of a systems analyst and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the ESL Department Chair knows how many credits each ESL student is taking in any given semester. With this analysis, BHCC learned that some students prefer to enrol in 12 credits two days a week which led to the introduction of day sections that meet once a week instead of twice and they have been some of the first classes to reach capacity.

A cohort of ESL students is followed for 5 years to study retention and graduation rates. Of every graduating class, BHCC knows how many have taken non-credit and credit ESL courses and compares how this population matches up to students enrolled in developmental courses who do not take ESL and other student cohorts.

Currently, 92% of incoming students test as needing additional assistance with reading, writing and/or mathematics. Research has indicated that students who persist in their courses succeed. Unfortunately, many students drop out before giving success a chance. To meet both the academic and non-academic needs of students, BHCC initiated a Developmental Education Task Force (DTF). The DTF proposed adding literacy specialists and advisors/tutors to support the unique needs of these students. BHCC has seen success and received much positive feedback from students who previously had felt "left out" of education. For the lowest level students, BHCC offers a dedicated literacy specialist and assigned tutor/advisor. When students move to the second level of developmental education, BHCC directs them to the Lab for further, yet independent, support.

The failure rate of former ESL students in college content courses, paying attention to the courses that are more writing intensive, is always analyzed. In 1998, because of

a 35% failure rate in college content courses by former ESL students, the ESL Department moved from a grammar based curriculum to a reading/writing/grammar across the curriculum and since then the success rate has increased.

The English Department has made a number of improvements to its program. Students who do not pass the department's Basic Competency Writing Exam can receive the In Progress grade and register for a free In Progress Course. These students can receive extra structured time on task in the Lab, where they can take practice exit writing exams and receive qualitative feedback.

ESL faculty members can assign this In progress grade to their students who can complete their course for free in the Lab under the supervision of Lab staff members.

Exit examinations for developmental reading students are aligned via grade level equivalent reading selections. All these changes and supports have ensured students are "college-ready" when entering 100 level courses.