

## STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

### Background

Fewer than six in ten students who begin their studies at a four-year college or university earn a baccalaureate degree within six years. The rapidly escalating cost of higher education makes a six-plus year education a substantially greater financial strain than the once-traditional four-year degree. Demands are rising for institutions to provide the best possible support that will not only enable timely completion, but will help students obtain a well-paying job after graduation.

Nearly every institution is providing a critical academic safety net with one form or another of the student success center, or SSC. The Chronicle of Higher Education reports that 60% of institutions today have full-time staff – and in some cases, entire departments or offices -- dedicated to student success and learning support. While student learning support has always been part of academic life, the need for such services have grown exponentially as access to higher education has broadened.

In recent decades, globalization, demographic shifts, and advances in learning science have resulted in dramatically increased enrollments of non-traditional students, international students, transfer students, learning-diverse students, underprepared and underprivileged students, and ethnic/cultural minority students. In response, institutions have developed support centers with increasingly diverse programs to rapidly help these new students thrive, grow, and graduate.



Over 260 different names for organizations providing student success services are listed on LSCHÉ's website

For more information please see:

National College Learning Center Association [www.nclca.org](http://www.nclca.org)

Learning Support Centers in Higher Education [www.lsche.net](http://www.lsche.net)

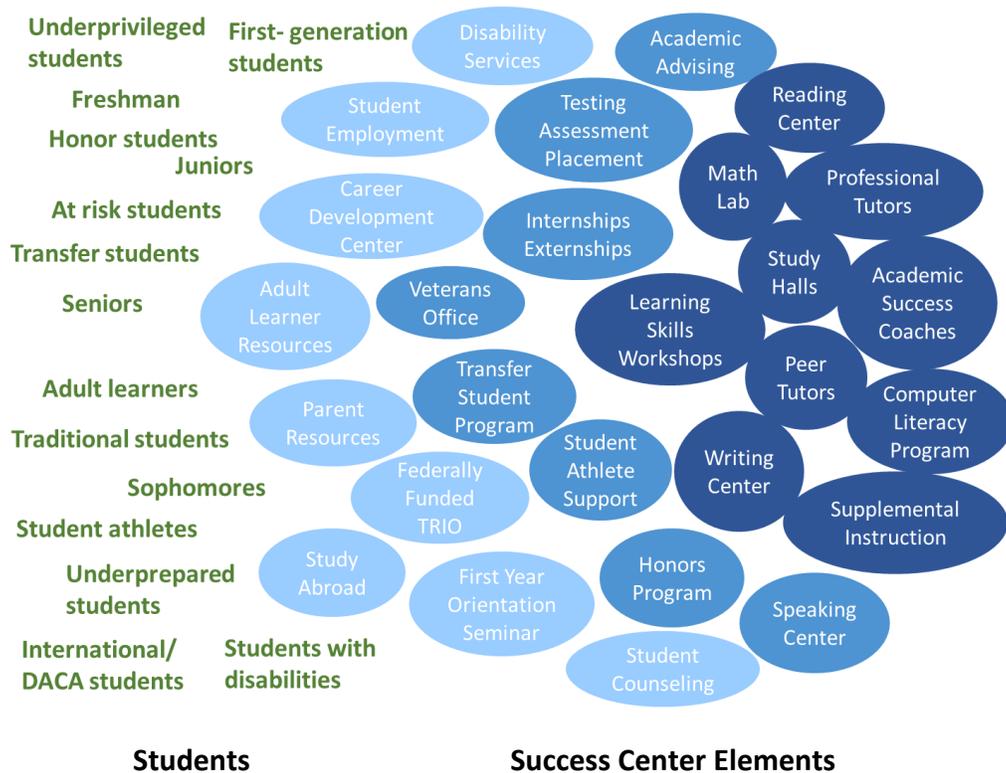
### Today's SSC

While once stigmatized as the domain of remedial assistance for academically struggling students, SSCs today are perceived as major institutional resources for the entire student population, and often include programs such as Honors, Family Support, and Adult Learner Resources. Students at all levels of achievement seek out personalized support to both address academic weaknesses and polish individual strengths to achieve their full potential.

The services offered in today's SSCs vary based on institution size, the nature and needs of its student population, the funding available, the support provided by academic leadership, and the degree of integration desired with other services on campus. Most campuses have established SSCs that seem to organize themselves along a continuum of integrated services.

- At one end of the student support services continuum, a **core SSC** provides essential services such as reading, math, and writing labs, peer and professional tutors, and various learning skills workshops, and then seeks to coordinate with other related student services located elsewhere on campus.
- At the other end of the continuum, an **integrated SSC** provides all the core elements but also gathers critical related support functions in other administrative units to concentrate student support resources into a single, highly visible, and coordinated facility.

While all types of SSCs provide needed services to students, in general, the greater degree of integration of related services, the greater the benefits that accrue to students, staff, and institutions. The diagram below captures the diversity, differences, and range of programs and elements in today's SSCs. The program elements in **darkest blue** are typically found within a **core SSC**, while an **integrated SSC** may include most if not all of the services shown. The diversity of student populations that an SSC might serve appear in the text on the left.



A **core SSC** should be in a central and visible location. Related services, distributed elsewhere on campus, can make coordination challenging. Frequently, students don't know what kind of help they need, and are not aware of the type of help available to them. If a student needing help walks into the SSC and is told that they should instead go to Academic Advising or the Transfer Student Program located elsewhere on campus, they often get discouraged and do not follow through. To overcome this problem, it is not unusual for an SSC staff member to walk a student to the required service provider.

An **integrated SSC** can provide more coordinated support to students, while also evolving to meet changing student needs. Students can walk in the door, get their questions fully answered by a knowledgeable staff person, and connect with needed support resources on the spot.

- Some SSCs identify a single point of contact for each student to ensure continuity that encourages supportive relationships that can endure throughout a student's college years.
- The activity level, energy, and amenities of integrated SSCs make them a key selling point for attracting new students and retaining current ones.
- Collocating previously separate units concentrates staff and physical resources, and fosters collaboration and a systematized, team-based approach to dealing with student needs.
- Clustering academic support services within an integrated SSC allows staff to create a joint collective identity in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Integrated SSCs have their costs, however. The capital cost of a dedicated, comprehensive renovated or new facility can be substantial. In addition, the organizational change effort required to integrate previously independent units can be a challenge.

## Space and Design

Regardless of the degree of integration, successful SSC design occurs at the "intersection of pedagogy, technology, virtual space, physical space/environment, and student input/needs," as one center framed it. The ideal SSC is a highly visible, fully accessible, student-centric hub of activity located where students most often are, such as the library or a main classroom building. It is a warmly inviting facility with a contemporary and definitely non-remedial "vibe."

Arriving students first encounter a welcoming reception lounge with comfortable seating and tables for them to wait for appointments, hang out, or study alone and in groups. They are greeted by cross-trained staff members who can respond quickly to student questions and connect them to the appropriate resource. Easy access to coffee and snacks is a must.

Multiple conference, meeting, and tutoring spaces of various sizes are key features of the SSC, with an integrated SSC including a larger number of these spaces than core SSCs. Large, dedicated study halls can be located within the SSC, in adjacent space, or elsewhere on campus.

Technology is so central to SSC functionality that many have their own IT service staff. Data analytics and student tracking systems provide staff with early identification of at-risk students so that interventions can be designed for each. Technology also serves to track student use of the facility over time to help justify the operational budget.



An ample number of computer workstations for students can be scattered around for students to work on projects or homework. A computer lab can serve multiple functions such as math or computer tutoring, placement testing, and homework sessions.

SSC staff offices provide staff workspace as well as places to meet privately with students. Conveniently located workroom/kitchen/lunch space, secure file room, and copier/storage/mail room support overall SSC operations.

The more functions sharing SSC spaces, the less administrative redundancy is required and the more efficiently space can be used – and the more energy, presence, and visibility the SSC will have.

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