

The Beginnings: 1960-1974

In the 1960's, Professor Andrew Baer, of the Dartmouth Psychology Department, became interested in providing resources for academic and learning-related counseling. Baer ran a small study skills operation in North Fairbanks Hall, where there were reading machines, note taking "inspirational quips", and books containing information on how to "read for meaning".

In the early 1970s, Dartmouth College hired Dr. Bruce Baker to work in the Counseling Center. The Center had sought to meet students' needs in areas such as academic, career, graduate school, and psychological counseling. Soon after Baker began, he met with President Kemeny and informed him of the inconvenience of the location of the counseling center in North Fairbanks Hall. He insisted that it was out not within the normal student body's traffic pattern, and was being bypassed for that reason. In 1972, the College moved the Center to the third floor of College Hall, which is now Collis Center.

The late 60s and early 70s proved to be a time of great transition, not only for the United States, but for Dartmouth College as well. Not only did the Dartmouth switch from a semester to a quarter system, but, in 1969, John R. McLane, Jr. '38, chaired an influential committee on equal opportunity. The McLane report identified the need to increase academic support programs for minorities due to the differences in academic preparation between minority and white students. Also, in the fall of 1972, the first female students were admitted to the college.

Dr. Bruce Baker worked in conjunction with undergraduate minority students, such as Nelson Armstrong '71, to develop academic support. When students were referred to the office, Baker used reading tests to evaluate the students' performance. He taught students the SQ3R method to improve reading comprehension and rate, showed them how to utilize SRA reading machines, and provided them with handouts on various topics concerning academia. Armstrong helped create a vocabulary list that familiarized black students with words that they encountered in introductory courses such as macro- and micro-economics, first year English, seminars, and calculus.

It quickly became apparent that the Academic Support Center was outgrowing its space in College Hall (i.e. Collis Center today), and Baker recognized the fact that the academic support services needed to expand and form a new office. Although funds were not available to form a separate office, in 1973 Baker hired a Hanover High School teacher on sabbatical, named Lillian Bailey. Bailey was specifically interested in colleges' academic expectations of incoming freshmen.

From February to mid-May, 1973, forty two students used Academic Support Services, and 23 students attended class sessions taught by Bailey to learn reading and study skills. The Deans' Office had "strongly encouraged" 16 out of those 23 students to attend the sessions. There were students at each session, meeting twice a week for forty five minutes.

Concurrently, the College began to question the value of the Summer Bridge Program, which helped prepare academically disadvantaged students (primarily minorities) for Dartmouth's high academic demands. In the summer of 1974, the Counseling Center hired Sandra Epps, a reading specialist from the State University of New York, to teach a Bridge Program course emphasizing methods to strengthen comprehension, retention, and organizational skills. Professors Kenneth Bogart and William Cook of the Bridge Program wanted to create continued academic support for students after the completion of the program.

However, the College soon considered the Bridge Program and the Counseling Center insufficient in regards to the terms of academic support. In response, some of the Math Department Deans, including Dr. Bruce Baker, Dean Ralph Manuel, and Professor Don Krieder, proposed forming an autonomous academic support organization entitled the Reading and Study Skills Center (RSSC). This was made possible by the funds originally allocated to the Bridge Program. At the same time, the English Department received approval to establish the Resource Center for Composition. It was there that students were able to improve their grammar skills and the content of their academic papers.

*(Note: In the late 1980's, the Resource Center was renamed the Composition Center, and has recently [2004] been incorporated into the Student Center for Research, Writing, and Information Technology [RWIT], located in Berry Library. The RWIT provides tutors to undergraduate students who need assistance with papers as well as research and multimedia projects).