

The Academic Skills Center: 1983-1993

During the summer of 1983, the College hired Carl Thum to replace Karen Pelz as the first full-time Director of the Reading and Study Skills Center, and he began his duties on August 1, 1983. With the new Director came a different, broader focus. Thum wanted the Reading and Study Skills Center to be recognized not only as a tutorial center, but also as an academic resource offering services to the entire Dartmouth student community. In 1985, the Center's name was changed to the Academic Skills Center.

Carl immediately realized that the Tutor Clearinghouse was working. Desiring to extend the ASC's support to more students, Carl implemented workshops. He enhanced programming on every level, and perhaps most importantly, began to meet individually with students in personal academic skills advising sessions. In extending the ASC to a broader range of students, Carl faced the challenge of raising programming to a level that the average Dartmouth student would find appealing.

As Carl began to meet with students individually, he noticed students with undiagnosed learning disabilities. Carl took on the responsibility of identifying these students and having them tested. He began to see the need for educating the Dartmouth community at large regarding LD students. Policy changes would eventually come with the need for foreign language requirement waivers, and would culminate in 1987 when the ASC held a symposium focusing on learning disabilities at selective colleges and universities. Nancy Pompian, then administering the Tutor Clearinghouse, became a student of disabilities. She became nationally active in the field by speaking at conferences, and by helping to write national guidelines for documentation.

1983-1984

From 1983-1984, the Reading and Study Skills Center assumed partial responsibility for students with physical and learning disabilities, and started to address their special needs. For the first time, the RSSC made a clear statement addressing its role vis-a-vis students with learning disabilities. Dartmouth recognized that it had a number of dyslexic students, diagnosed or undiagnosed. Thum presented an informational session to the admissions office after the officers expressed concern over their lack of knowledge.

Furthermore, the Center developed a program to deal with students who had difficulty with the English language. The RSSC and Jennifer Joseph of the IAS program worked together to form an informal English as a Second Language (ESL) program for students who needed extra help with English. These students received encouragement from their deans to pay heed to their language deficiencies. This

way, a simple language barrier would not be holding students back from reaching full potential.

Due to the expanding services of the RSSC, Thum noted that the office needed additional changes. It was in dire need of a full-time secretary. The budget, as always, was a point of contention that hindered the hiring of such a secretary. Thum also noted in the 1984 year-end report that "the title of the Reading and Study Skills Center is not only a misnomer, but it may provide a remedial and/or minority-related image that discourages students from using its services." He also mentioned the inadequacy of the office space in 210 College Hall. Thum was headed in the direction of change.

1984-1985

1985 proved to be another year of transition for the RSSC. Most importantly, its name was changed to the Academic Skills Center (ASC), in line with Thum's recommendation from the previous year. Due to the expansion of Career and Employment Services (CES) and a lack of space, the Center moved from the second floor of College Hall where it had been located in the same office as CES, to the basement, 6 College Hall. There, the Center was able to acquire its own identity.

As the ASC was broadening its services, a continuation of incorporation form the previous year, Nancy Pompian initiated a project studying the breadth of dyslexia at the College. She gathered information, contacted other institutions, spoke with appropriate members of the Dartmouth community, and conducted interviews with those students who volunteered to discuss being a learning-disabled student at Dartmouth. She and Thum concluded that the College should focus on:

- foreign language waivers
- reasonable accommodations such as untimed tests
- campus awareness of the implications of dyslexia on learning
- testing of previously undiagnosed suspected dyslexics
- advising students on their courses, majors, and careers
- a support group
- establishing a central place on campus for learning disabilities concerns.

Carl Thum and Nancy Pompian notified the deans of the faculty and college about these recommendations.

Along with this, the ASC added a new program to its Tutor Clearinghouse, namely study groups initiated by Nancy Pompian. They were initially formed in response to the overwhelming demand for individual tutors in large introductory courses such as Economics 1. In addition to making tutoring available to more students, experimental study groups for economics provided exposure to different methods of problem solving and ways of understanding the material in a group atmosphere.

Overall, a total of 653 students received either group or individual tutoring in 1984-1985. Non-financial-aid students paid \$15 to participate in a study group and the College compensated payment for students on financial aid.

1985-1986

During the 1985-86 academic year, the ASC continued programs implemented during the past two years. With an increased emphasis on promotion, student usage of the Center was on the upswing. The Tutor Clearinghouse serviced 450 students for individual tutoring, 57% of whom were on financial aid, and study groups became permanently part of the Tutor Clearinghouse. They met for a number of courses including Economics 1 and 2, Chemistry 5 and 51, and Physics 13. Thum taught six one-session workshops covering essential academic skills and a seven-session course in reading improvement. He also assisted Dr. Michael Gaylor, Counseling and Mental Health, and Professors Tom Schemanske and Reese Prosser, Mathematics Department, in teaching a math anxiety workshop. In all workshops, attendance proved to be better in the fall and winter, and then lagged in the spring.

Dartmouth's efforts in the area of dyslexia/learning disabilities put it on the forefront of highly selective academic institutions in the United States. Carl Thum served on Dean Edward Shanahan's committee to investigate the College's responsibility to its dyslexic/learning disabled students. The committee developed a specific programmatic approach including greater faculty awareness, language waivers, and a referral process. As a result of Pompian's extensive research, the ASC tentatively planned to host a symposium in the spring of 1987. In addition, the Center helped form a weekly student support group. The budget and the lack of a full-time secretary were the only points of concern. Thum mentioned that "while there are advantages to having full-time, leave-term students, continuity and trained professionalism is lacking."

1986-1987

The highlight of the 1986-1987 academic year was the "Dyslexic/Learning Disabled Students at Selective Colleges: An Invitational Symposium" hosted by the ASC on April 16 and 17, 1987. More than 130 participants (administrators, deans, faculty, and students) represented forty of America's finest institutions of higher education. The symposium provided a forum for current information about learning disabilities and ways in which colleges should accommodate learning disabled students.

During the year, 218 students received individual tutoring in various courses, and 415 enrolled in study groups. Math, Spanish, French, chemistry, economics, physics, biology, computer science, Italian and German were the most frequently requested subjects. The Tutor Clearinghouse also introduced an additional new service for

students. The River Cluster Drop-in Tutoring for Math was a term-long, college-wide project held during the fall of 1986 in which students met for biweekly tutoring sessions in Math 2, 3, 11, and 17. Eighteen students participated in this project.

1987-1988

The ASC worked on several projects in the 1987-1988 academic year, especially in the area of learning disabilities. Carl Thum and Nancy Pompian co-authored a report entitled *Dyslexia/Learning Disabilities in Higher Education: A Survey of Thirty-five Selective Colleges, 1988*, published in the 1988 issue of the Orton Dyslexia Society's *Analysis of Dyslexia*. The ASC expanded its role as an office for disabled students and implemented a system for the timely diagnosis of learning disabled students by working with a consultant through Dick's House, Anne Silberfarb. Nancy Pompian co-chaired the Section 504 Committee to improve handicap awareness at the College and to initiate specific services for Dartmouth's disabled students. She was named Student Disabilities Coordinator and became responsible for physical as well as learning disabilities.

An expanded array of workshops were offered to the Dartmouth community, Dartmouth students attended workshops for writing personal essays (for law and medical school applications), and Dartmouth Medical School (DMS) students attended two workshops in preparation for Medical Board Examinations. UGA's and AC's went to "Fast-Track," a five-week fall course taught by Thum covering time management, academics, nutrition, and stress management. Thus the leaders of the residential halls gained awareness of the ASC's services and could refer their peers to the Center.

Approximately 700 students used the services of the Tutor Clearinghouse throughout the course of the year. In the individual tutoring program, 354 students received tutoring in over 100 different courses, and similarly, 313 students signed up for study groups. Another experimental drop-in tutoring program took place in the River Cluster during the fall term (this time in Chemistry 5). The sessions were poorly attended, and the program was dropped.

In the Goals section of the 1987-1988 Year-End Report, Thum expressed a desire to develop more active relationships with minority students, specifically African American and Native American students. This desire was merely a foreshadowing of excellent future relationships with such minority students.

1988-1989

In addition to the regular services provided by the Academic Skills Center in the 1988-1989 academic years, the ASC initiated an intermediate level ESL course during the winter term. It was geared toward graduate students and their spouses who wished to improve their writing or speaking skills. Experienced student drill

instructors employed the Rassias method and met with ESL students twice a week. An average of thirteen students attended the sessions beginning winter term.

In the meantime, the ASC was finally able to hire a permanent half-time secretary, Patricia McLane, and many more advancements were made in the area of student learning disabilities. Pompian and Thum prescreened a total of fifty five students (referred by deans, professors, and others) for learning disabilities. Twenty-five students petitioned for and received language waivers. A card sent to students' mailboxes, and for the first time Dartmouth students were given the opportunity to identify themselves as physically disabled. Twenty one of these students filled out and submitted these cards. The Class of 1993 received a disabilities reply card in their acceptance packages; seven students replied. Pompian noted this, and as Student Disabilities Coordinator she initiated liaisons with Thayer, Tuck, and the Medical school. As co-chairperson of the 504 Committee, she promoted handicap access and correlated campus signage.

The individual tutoring and study group programs grew slightly, with a total of 700 students signing up for tutoring services. In addition to previous study groups, the program formed groups in Economics 10, Engineering 22, and Chemistry 4.

1989-1990

By the 1989-1990 academic year, the ASC's services, programs, and activities were well-established in the Dartmouth community. All areas of the Center experienced growth. While general use of the Tutor Clearinghouse increased gradually, individual academic counseling and learning disabilities prescreenings dramatically expanded. The second year of the intermediate-level ESL program appeared to be as effective as the first. As a rule, the Center experienced much activity in the fall and winter terms, with a marked decrease in usage during the spring and summer. Non-financial-aid students had to pay \$20 instead of \$15 to attend study groups, while the College continued to pay for financial-aid students.

The ASC was more involved than ever in assessing and responding to physical and learning disabilities. Pompian and Thum served on a planning and coordinating committee representing Dartmouth, Harvard, Wellesley and Barnard that hosted a one-day conference at Harvard for 58 highly selective colleges and universities entitled "The Next Step: An Invitational Symposium on Learning Disabilities in Selective Colleges." This symposium was a follow-up to the 1987 symposium hosted by the ASC at Dartmouth. The College and ASC revised the payment policy for psychoeducational testing. Prescreenings increased slightly to 59. Of the 41 actually tested, 27 were positive and 13 negative with one unknown. Twenty-two students received foreign language waivers. In the realm of physical disabilities, accommodations were sought by fifteen physically disabled students with: epilepsy,

deafness, legal blindness, psychiatric disorder, stuttering and other speech disorders, severed hand tendon, blindness, cerebral palsy, cancer, and brain injuries.

The individual tutoring and study group programs served 900 students, with 523 receiving individual tutoring and 386 joining study groups. The Native American program cooperated with the ASC when a Native American MALS (Master of Arts and Liberal Sciences) student was paid to tutor a Native American Student in writing.

However, Thum continued to notice a consistent lack of participation among the African American and Native American communities at the Academic Skills Center. He also expressed that the half-time academic secretary position had become inadequate to meet the staffing demands of the Center.

1990-1991

From 1990-1991, the Academic Skills Center began to tackle the problem of minority and specialized-student usage. It expanded the study group program to provide specific study group opportunities to Native Americans (in the NAD house) and athletes (in Davis Varsity House). The ASC also planned to provide study group opportunities to African American students in Cutter Hall (now Shabazz). Furthermore, the ASC in conjunction with Tuck proposed to arrange a summer LEAD-type program for rising minority high school juniors to provide exposure to business and management skills. Finally, Sylvia Langford was hired for the year to serve in the capacity of a minority academic skills counselor. Langford, however, stayed only a few months and was subsequently hired as a class dean.

The student disabilities services grew significantly in the 1990-91 year. The learning disabilities evaluation payment process was evaluated by Dean Shanahan, John Turco, Michael Gaylor, Yolanda Baumgartner, Virginia Hazen, Carl Thum, Nancy Pompian, Patricia McLane and Anne Silberfarb. They determined the process was financially successful in that the health service did not lose on collections to pay for testing. Under the payment policy, non-financial-aid students whose medical insurance made only partial or no payment for psychoeducational testing paid for their own testing. Financial-aid students were permitted to request extensions of their loans for non-covered payment. Ninety-five students were prescreened, an increase of thirty six students over the last year. Of those tested for a learning disability, forty two were positive and seven negative. Twenty-nine students received foreign language waivers. Pompian sought to increase community awareness of physical disabilities by having two disabled students accompany him to assist with presentations made at Indian River Junior High in Enfield, a local junior high school.

1991-1992

The ASC continued its commitment to Disabilities Services during the 1991-1992 school year. On April 29 and 30, 1992, the ASC participated in a conference held at Phillips Exeter Academy that addressed the issues of learning disabilities at selective private secondary schools. This meeting was the second that stemmed from the original 1987 symposium held at Dartmouth. A "Next Step" college-level symposium, held at Connecticut College in June 1992, was the third such outgrowth. Attendance was very small.

Other developments included the initiation of an experimental study group for Native American students (organized in collaboration with the NA Program Office). Students who took Psychology 1 were eligible. Plans were made to implement the group in future years. In addition, the ASC moved its English as a Second Language course (taught for the previous three years) to the Language Outreach Office.

Much of the year was spent in preparation for the move to the Norris Cotton Center, where the ASC spent the 1992-1993 school year. College Hall, later to be called the Collis Center, was renovated during that time. An overall drop in student contact (2413) reflects this, although student use of both the Tutor Clearinghouse and Study Group programs increased overall.

1992-1993

From 1992-1993 the ASC was located on the second floor of the Norris Cotton Center on Maynard Street. Although both Carl Thum and Nancy Pompian enjoyed their immediate surroundings (the workplace and colleagues), this temporary location was well off the beaten path. Therefore, the ASC suffered a decline in use this year, most notably in the Tutor Clearinghouse program (which also suffered because of underbudgeting). Total contact fell to 2302.

Despite this decline, the year consisted of formulating a vision for the future in anticipation of the ASC's return to the Collis Center. An NCAA grant made possible the hiring of Gail Zimmerman, a half-time academic advisor. In addition, the ASC initiated a roadshow titled "Maximizing Your Dartmouth Education" in collaboration with Abraham Hunter in Career Services. The administrative assistant position held by Sarah Spiegel was upgraded to full-time status, and the Study Group program experienced a dramatic rise in participation.

Disabilities services likewise saw growth. Nancy Pompian increased prescreening appointments. Twenty seven students were granted language waivers, and twenty one students were accommodated for physical disabilities. Nancy also led a wheel-through of the Dartmouth Medical School in preparation of a student using a wheelchair to arrive in 1993.