

The Reading and Study Skills Center: 1974-1983

Karen Pelz started working as the director of the RSSC in November, 1974. Pelz came from a strong background in education and taught at a junior college before arriving at Dartmouth. Pelz devoted her energy to turning the RSSC into a viable student service. When she arrived, the RSSC was suffering limited space and materials, so she spent much of her time during the winter and spring terms of 1975 researching students' needs and developing a better program. Pelz even journeyed to other colleges and universities to gain insight to how their academic support programs functioned.

The RSSC initially offered workshops and individual academic counseling, and administered the Tutor Clearinghouse, which the RSSC "inherited" from the Freshman Office. Pelz herself taught three workshops each term: Study Skills, Vocabulary Skills, and Reading for Speed and Comprehension. The Study Skills and Reading workshops were the most popular, with twenty students enrolled in each. These workshops met biweekly for three to four weeks. Pelz also gave hour-long workshops on note taking and exam-preparation techniques and taught a section of English 2. She recorded her lectures on cassettes and made handouts for students who missed a workshop. Her dedication to students' academic achievement was always extremely apparent.

Between twenty and thirty students participated in the Tutor Clearinghouse each term. The majority of students requested tutors for math, biology, and chemistry. Although recruiting tutors was not an issue, lack of funds became a major point of contention. The main conflict concerned figuring out who would pay for tutors: the Financial Aid Office or the RSSC?

The following year, 1976, continued in a similar fashion. Pelz continued to offer study and reading skills workshops which, according to her reports, were effective and considered quite valuable by students. She spent much of her time counseling individuals on reading assignments, time management, and preparing term papers. Pelz's motivation and drive never wavered.

Reading & Study Skills Center Staff

In 1976, the RSSC underwent quite a bit of change and expansion. As the reputation of the Tutor Clearinghouse spread, the number of participants began to increase. During the winter term of 1976, forty one students used the Clearinghouse, and, by fall term, that number had increased to sixty six. In addition, the RSSC purchased a used typewriter and instruction books specifically for students to utilize. In the spring and winter terms, the RSSC moved from the third floor to the second floor of College Hall. On October 1, 1976, David Powlinson was hired as a half-time assistant. Pelz continued to split her time between directing the RSSC and teaching English 2 for the English Department. Pelz wrote a proposal, dated October 20, for a Credit/No Credit course in reading and study skills. The cost to implement this course was \$11,000. The College turned it down.

On March 3, 1977, Dartmouth College accepted a proposal to replace the summer Bridge Program with the Intensive Academic Support Program (IAS), renamed Integrative Academic Support in the 1990's. Unlike the Bridge Program, the IAS was a year-long support program for academically disadvantaged first year students. The RSSC director served on the IAS Steering

Committee. Thus the College phased out the Bridge Program, relying upon the now three different academic support resources: the Reading and Study Skills Center, the Intensive Academic Support Program, and the Composition Center.

The RSSC offered three- and four-week workshops, as it had done in previous years. Pelz and Powlinson worked individually with students who needed help with foreign languages and/or study skills. They also focused their energies on creating two study skills manuals in mathematics and foreign languages. Students who had performed well in related courses wrote most of the manuals, providing useful tips on how they studied effectively, and grew to become successful students.

Pelz and the Financial Aid Office finally agreed on the payment of tutors for the Tutor Clearinghouse. The Financial Aid Office would pay 75% of the cost for tutees on financial aid, while the remaining 25% was billed to the student tutee's college account. There was some dissatisfaction with this system, since bookkeeping and paperwork were burdensome.

The 1977-78 academic year saw a turnover in staff at the RSSC. Elizabeth Baer was hired as Assistant Director on February 1, 1978, to replace David Powlinson. In early May, Pelz won a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to study the teaching of writing and to finish her dissertation at the University of Iowa. This grant and subsequent faculty responsibilities at Dartmouth took her away from the Center for two-and-a-half years. Baer served as the Acting Director in her absence, and Elinor Horne, who taught in the IAS Program, worked as a part-time Assistant Director.

At the beginning of each term, the RSSC offered two three-week workshops in reading and two workshops in study skills. In addition to the programs focusing on Dartmouth students, the Center expanded its services and provided a study skills workshop for a small group of nurses from the Mary Hitchcock School of Nursing. The RSSC also combined a section of study skills/effective reading for the high school students at the ABC House.

From 1977-1978, the Tutor Clearinghouse served between sixty and eighty tutees each term. Approximately half of the tutees were on financial aid. The College changed its policy concerning tutor costs and made the decision to cover the full cost of tutoring for students on financial aid. Math, chemistry, physics and French were the subject areas that received the highest request for tutors. Also, a poll was conducted, and its results showed much positive feedback regarding the Tutor Clearinghouse.

As word of the Center spread, the number of students coming in for individual academic counseling increased dramatically. The greatest surge in demand occurred at obvious "panic points" in the term (beginning, mid-term, finals), but there was also a fairly steady stream throughout the term. While Elizabeth Baer dealt with administrative work and met privately with students, Elinor Horne concentrated on international students because of her linguistics background. Deans and faculty members referred students often, and most came in for assistance on papers or in reading. Over 50% of these students returned for a second visit.

Baer noted that space became a problem. There was not enough office space for her or Horne, and the area lacked single study spaces for students. She also acknowledged that there was confusion as to the duties of the Reading and Study Skills Center and the responsibilities of the Composition Center.