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Writing Outpost Highlights New Programs Offered in College Learning Center

WORCESTER, Ma – Quinsigamond Community College has expanded its state of the art Harrington Learning Center with the addition of three programs designed specifically to aid its 13,000 full and part-time students. With Tim LaFountaine leading the way, QCC has re-vamped and, more importantly, re-energized the Communication Skills Center (CSC) with a Writing Workshops Series, a Satellite Tutoring Center for students, and the CEET program – Classroom Experience and English Training.

"We still have the traditional tutoring services for our students, but I felt the need for staff and faculty to better connect with the students," states LaFountaine, Learning Manager of the CSC. "These new programs will help with that, as will the training and team building that goes with them. Any connection the student can make to the College is important."

With college enrollment a hot topic at many colleges and universities, LaFountaine's goal is to increase student retention by improving the academic quality of the CSC programs. He began with an Outreach initiative, to spread the word as to what his team could offer faculty and students and to drive more students to utilize services. In total, 1756 students were served this past spring 2006 alone, with the number of visits to the Learning Center at over 10,000 for the semester.

“The numbers are exciting, but language tutoring is so much more than telling a student, ‘That’s a verb.’ We wanted to figure out exactly what the students needed,” LaFountaine explains.

As a result, spring semester saw the launch of the Writing Workshop series, which consisted of five workshops an hour in length. Despite being similar to an extra-curricular class one signs up for, still 51 students attended. Twelve Writing Workshops will be offered in the fall, each expected to be nearly filled. The focus will not be solely on correcting grammar or punctuation, but on helping students become better writers and thinkers.

“We are not here just for the struggling students, though,” LaFountaine adds. “Some of the students who come to our workshops and visit tutors are over-achievers, yet they’ll visit us three times a week all semester.”

The Satellite Tutoring Center, or Writing Outpost, is stationed on the third floor of the Administration building – a “satellite” to the general tutoring area. LaFountaine found that many students worked in other areas and labs on campus, rather than the tutoring center, so he “put tutors where the students were, rather than asking the students to find the tutors.” Although this first Writing Outpost is across campus, within two years LaFountaine hopes to have additional off-campus, “satellite” Tutoring Centers at QCC’s downtown and Southbridge locations.

“Our Satellite Tutoring Center is a unique feature, and the first I know of in area colleges where we send our tutors to the students. With the two additional locations coming soon, we will stand out even more,” LaFountaine says.

The Classroom Experience and English Training (CEET) program is another of the Learning Center’s new programs. LaFountaine wanted to facilitate communication between the faculty and his support staff. The CEET program provides a chance for faculty to address

every tutor and staff member, and explain their expertise and teaching style. With this knowledge, tutors are better equipped to help students in their work and their understanding of a certain professor's expectations. LaFountaine states that the reaction from faculty has been "fantastic."

The CSC tutoring staff is made up of honor students, faculty, and staff, with LaFountaine beaming that they are all good-hearted, helpful people. His staff is diverse in age and experience, directly reflecting the diversity of QCC's student body. They are all part of QCC's and Tim LaFountaine's continuing efforts to provide new and better learning experiences for all students.

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