Chapter 02 - The Learning Commons

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The Learning Commons

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Interested in learning about some of the resources and services available in your library? Want to get your money’s worth and be a successful university student at the same time? This chapter will provide you with a brief introduction to Western’s Learning Commons. You can use the resources and services highlighted at any time during your studies at WWU.

Historically, libraries have provided students with the resources needed to support their research and writing success, but with a new move towards establishing learning commons structures in library settings, students now have an array of services and resources available under one roof (Heitsch & Holley, 2011; McKay, 2014). Western Libraries launched the development of Western’s Learning Commons in 2010 as a way of bringing together library and non-library services to support teaching and learning at WWU. Western Libraries and the Learning Commons are committed to providing you with the resources needed to succeed in the following three learning outcomes:

- To use and value inquiry for gaining and sharing knowledge
- To collaborate as respectful, productive, and ethical members of a diverse and inclusive intellectual community
- To demonstrate a sense of agency for managing own learning

As McMullen (2008) explains, each institution configures its learning commons slightly differently depending on their students’ needs; however, there are specific features that can be found in almost all learning commons:

- computer stations
- collaborative spaces
- a service desk
- an array of centers (ex. writing centers, instructional centers, presentation support centers)
- lounge areas and eateries

All of the listed characteristics exist in your Learning Commons at Western. If you enjoy working in a vibrant, open space or if you are hoping to collaborate on a project with your peers, you can find collaborative spaces on the second floor of Wilson Library equipped with large whiteboards, mobile furniture, and much more. There is also a Collaborative Mediascape Table available on the second floor of Wilson where you and at least five other colleagues can connect your laptops and screen share on two large displays. An eatery is also available on the second floor of Wilson Library, Zoe’s Bagelry, and you can find computer stations throughout that level as well as the second floor of Haggard Hall.
Currently, Western’s Learning Commons consists of eight program partners who provide distinctive services to assist students, faculty, and staff:

Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment (CIIA)

Although this is a faculty focused resource, CIIA provides faculty with instructional and course development support so that they can provide you with the most effective learning experience. For more information on CIIA, visit their website at [http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/default.asp](http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/default.asp).

Center for Service-Learning (CSL)

Service-learning is a teaching and learning method used to provide community engagement opportunities that enhance the classroom learning experience. The CSL offers a range of services and opportunities that support meaningful partnerships between on-campus, local, national, and international communities. Consider participating in an international service-learning course, join one of the CSL’s national days of service, or visit Classfinder to register for a class with a service-learning attribute (SL). For more information on these opportunities and many others, visit CSL’s website at [http://www.wwu.edu/csl](http://www.wwu.edu/csl).

Digital Media Center (DMC)

Are you interested in video production? Western’s DMC is equipped with a TV studio, green screen, cameras, a control room, and much more to support your video production needs. If you would like to take a peek at the DMC or learn more about their services, stop by Haggard Hall 246. Learn more: [https://wp.wwu.edu/digitalmediacenter/](https://wp.wwu.edu/digitalmediacenter/)

Hacker! Research & Writing Studio (RWS)

This observation probably will not come as a shock to you, but research and writing go hand in hand. Given these complementary processes, the Studio provides a collaborative space where student Studio assistants as well as faculty and staff, can assist with all your research and writing needs. If you get stuck or have a question or simply want to brainstorm ideas, stop by the Studio on the second floor of Haggard Hall. Even if you do not have an immediate question, you are always more than welcome to work on your research and writing assignments at the Studio with technology and human resources at the ready. The Studio can also provide you support online where you can submit your writing and research questions or drafts and receive sound response to your work in progress. The Studio also has an extensive set of online resources. To learn more about the Studio and their services, visit [https://library.wwu.edu/rws/about](https://library.wwu.edu/rws/about).

Student Technology Center (STC)

Much like the Studio and the Tutoring Center, STC believes in trained students assisting other students. The STC staff includes experienced and knowledgeable peers who provide workshops, peer tutoring, and informal assistance with various technologies. If you are interested in learning how to use Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator, or much more, consider registering for a free workshop by visiting STC’s webpage or stop by to say hi to their wonderful staff located on the second floor of Haggard Hall. STC’s website: [http://www.wwu.edu/techcenter/index.shtml](http://www.wwu.edu/techcenter/index.shtml)
Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA)

Looking for a space to meet other students as well as faculty and staff from across campus? Interested in gaining experience in facilitating small group dialogue, and even earning credit? Well, consider participating in the TLA which is a dialogue forum focused on enhancing the learning community at Western and beyond. Each fall, students, faculty, staff, and community members work together to develop a BIG study question for the year. Thereafter, they spend winter and spring quarters coming to understand the BIG question while working as co-inquirers to address the question. Often, this work results in institutional change initiatives – action steps that make teaching and learning at WWU even better. If you are curious at this moment, but you may still not quite understand how the TLA works or how it might benefit you, consider stopping by for one of the TLA dialogue sessions that occurs every other week. You will enjoy yourself and contribute to a better learning environment. For more information on the TLA and the dialogue session dates and times and to find out how to earn a practicum credit for participating, visit https://library.wwu.edu/tla.

Tutoring Center (TC)

As previously highlighted, the TC uses a peer-to-peer structure to support students in their math and science General University Requirement (GUR) courses. The TC’s collaborative space is available for drop-in tutoring sessions as well as for academic success tutoring. The TC also provides various resources such as calculators, textbooks, and solution manuals to assist with your studies in selected courses. Students often report that the TC saved their lives and GPAs. You can stop by and visit the TC on the second floor of Wilson Library or visit their website at http://www.wwu.edu/tutoring.

Writing Instruction Support (WIS)

Finally, WIS provides faculty with the resources needed to support writing courses at WWU; however, something most students are not aware of is that you can arrange an Alternative Writing Proficiency (WP) course and a selected professor through WIS. Students who are unable to satisfy the WP requirement through a regularly offered WP course may choose to submit an Alternative WP Course request to be reviewed by the WIS Director. Visit the WIS website for more information, https://library.wwu.edu/wis.

As you can see, the Learning Commons offers an array of services, resources, and spaces in one location. Many of these same resources also provide virtual services and tools to help you succeed in your studies at Western. So take advantage of all that your tuition money pays for and visit the Learning Commons in person or virtually.

Chapter Conclusion: Why is this important to you?

Overall, the primary goal of the Learning Commons is to bring together resources and services to advance teaching and learning, online and across the physical space of Western Libraries. You may be wondering, why is this important to you? Well, familiarizing yourself with the resources available puts you one step ahead. You can get started today with using the Hacherl Research and Writing Studio or visit the Student Technology Center. At this time, you may not need to use all of the services available to you, but you will at least know what is offered when needed.

Remember, the Learning Commons is here to support your academic success so if you have suggestions or comments regarding our resources, please let us know so we can provide you with the best services possible.
References

