INTRODUCTION:

As indicated in the Cerritos College Basic Skills Action Plan, the institution dedicated itself to the transformation of its academic support structure into a “Success Center” model. Over the past few years, the Developmental Education Committee has fostered a dialogue about the potential for this direction, but to date little has been achieved in the way of demonstrable change.

The fuel driving this effort appears to be an awareness of the lack of collaboration and lack of coordination among the various academic support services. Over time, as with many other community colleges, departments, programs, and individuals have solved their own support issues by developing specific “boutique” programs serving unique populations. While the students in those programs are being served, the general student population, most of whom are underprepared, is unable to find adequate academic support. The plan that follows is intended to be a results-oriented road map to accomplish the changes outlined in the Cerritos Action Plan: a comprehensive academic support program that serves the needs of the entire student population and girds the goals of Cerritos College’s emerging educational philosophy.

Although the plan below is organized in “phases,” it is difficult to assign a perfectly linear order for these strategies or events. In part, some activities must occur simultaneously. However, thinking and working in phases may help the team at Cerritos to work incrementally toward change.

Consistently, the plan revolves around two critical questions:

1. What are the goals of transforming academic support at Cerritos College?

2. How will the College know whether or not those goals have been met?

These two questions can prove to be an invaluable rudder as the College charts a course toward overall improvement.
PHASE I: Structuring a Coordinated Effort

1. ACTION STRATEGY: Appoint a single dean who will be responsible for the Cerritos College student success effort and the area of academic support services.

RATIONALE: Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges emphasizes the need for a coordinated effort. Since the Developmental Education Committee and the President have identified the need to transform policies, practices, and instructional delivery to promote the success of underprepared students, a single leader should be identified to coordinate the efforts of all invested parties to ensure that the institution sustains its commitment and that the appropriate resources will be available and properly utilized. The dean should also be the supervisor of all of the consolidated academic support structures once they are integrated. This leader will also require the support and partnership of a faculty coordinator and faculty leaders in each learning center in order to ensure that the vision is implemented.

INTENDED RESULT: The institution could be more effectively focused on its emerging student success agenda if coordinated by a single manager who is held responsible for the success of this initiative and its various components.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. To whom does the manager report?

2. How does this manager interface with other managers regarding this initiative?

3. What support does this manager need to accomplish the goals of the student success agenda?

2. ACTION STRATEGY: Consolidate the efforts of various “student success” groups into a single steering committee charged with guiding the re-formation of academic support at Cerritos.

RATIONALE: Cerritos College is experiencing a surge of interest and a re-commitment to student success. At this point, a number of efforts are beginning to emerge regarding
student success at Cerritos College: the iFALCON effort, the Student Success Plan, and the Developmental Education Committee. Joining these separate groups would optimize effort, energy, and resources. There is clearly a wave of optimism and energy toward major changes in academic support; however, there is also frustration with “endless” dialogue and ever-growing anxiety about actually developing and implementing a plan of action. Because the next steps must result in an action agenda, it is critical that the guiding committee be representative of all stakeholders and be comprised of decision-makers that can create change. In this way, the group can make decisions about action, rather than making recommendations that may not be granted “permission” by others.

This committee should meet routinely to govern and support student success issues at the College, which may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Establish institutional goals as they relate to “basic skills” and student success (i.e. mission statement)
- Establish and evaluate the action plan
- Establish criteria for institutionalizing innovative and effective programs
- Provide ongoing recommendations about improvements efforts
- Publicize recommendations to other shared governance bodies on campus
- Promote the effort throughout the institution

**INTENDED RESULT:** This committee could potentially re-form the structure, function, and philosophy of academic support in a relatively short span if it has the authority and leadership necessary to implement change.

**QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:**

1. Who should be part of the steering group?
2. To whom does the steering committee report?
3. What is the structure of the committee?
4. How often should the committee meet?
5. What philosophy will guide the committee’s work?
3. **ACTION STRATEGY:** Appoint a faculty coordinator to assist the dean in leading the transformation of academic support services.

RATIONALE: Currently, a number of academic programs have grown up in and around the Learning Resource Center. These programs are factionalized and directed by separate academic areas and leaders. Despite their close proximity and the potential for the Learning Resource Center to be a centralized hub of support, it is instead a series of “silos” that operate independently. That separation works to the detriment of students and contrary to the theories and practices that govern effective instruction. A single faculty coordinator who will coordinate with all of the disciplines represented in the learning centers will be essential to begin a structure that functions as a network. To be maximally effective, this should be the faculty member’s full assignment until the transition to a coordinated network is complete. In addition, a consistent level of faculty leadership within each of the learning centers is necessary to ensure instructional integrity and strong connections to the disciplines.

INTENDED RESULT: Assigning a faculty member responsibility for coordinating such a complex transformation will more likely result in a connected web of services that serve the learning needs of individual students, as well as the instructional needs of different departments and programs.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. How will the assignment be configured?

2. What contractual issues need to be addressed to assign someone to this position?

3. What are the qualities necessary for this person to be effective?

4. What structures can he or she create to connect formally with various stakeholders and represent their interests?

5. What learning centers currently lack individual faculty leadership?
6. How can equitable faculty leadership be assigned among the various programs?

4. **ACTION STRATEGY:** Consolidate existing pockets of academic support into a cohesive network of clearly delineated learning centers.

**RATIONALE:** With duplicated efforts taking place campus-wide, the current structure of academic support fails to maximize resources; embrace a consistent vision and philosophy; and foster collegiality among learning center personnel. During the site visit, stakeholders at various levels had little knowledge about services offered by other programs and when efforts were duplicated. The overall lack of connectedness ultimately fails to best serve the ever-growing learning needs of the Cerritos College student population.

**INTENDED RESULT:** The institution could more effectively serve students by focusing resources and energy into academic support centers that serve the discipline needs of all students in one location (i.e. Math support in one learning center). Such a coordinated effort would require better communication and collaboration among campus constituents, fostering a shared responsibility for student success rather than “everyone trying to solve their own problems.”

**QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:**

1. How many places offer duplicated academic support services?

2. How could these efforts be best consolidated?

3. What strategies can be used to maintain connectedness to departments?
5. ACTION STRATEGY: Re-configure the space in the Learning Resource Center to maximize the facility and its potential to serve as a comprehensive hub for academic support services.

RATIONALE: The Learning Resource Center is a more than adequate space to serve as the platform for the academic support needs at Cerritos College. It is centrally located, well-appointed, and expansive. In addition, it contains a variety of learning spaces to accommodate a number of instructional deliveries. Currently, however, the spaces seem haphazardly distributed among a variety of disciplines, and group spaces are seldom utilized. Similarly, the physical facilities are sometimes disproportionately allocated. For instance, some locations enjoy more space than can be used, while others are beyond capacity, especially if more course requirements are implemented. Removing classes, “labs,” semi-independent math and/or other functions scheduled in the facility will make more group space available that is key to diversifying the offerings within the academic support services units. In addition, basic signage and way-finding within the facility is problematic and confusing. Clear demarcation of service areas could enhance individual program identity within a centralized facility and make services easier for students to find. Supervised intake areas could also help students better navigate locations and offerings. No matter how the facility is configured, the space must be divided in a way that serves students rather than the ownership interests of individual programs and/or faculty.

INTENDED RESULT: The revision of space will clearly signal to the entire campus community that the College is moving in a new direction of academic support with an integrated service network that maximally utilizes facilities to serve student learning and support classroom instruction.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. What spaces within the LRC could be re-allocated for the academic support services network?

2. How could existing centers be re-configured to best utilize space?

3. What areas must be discreet and why?

4. What logical sharing opportunities exist?
5. What are the delivery methods that the space needs to support?

6. What improvements could be made so students could better connect to available services?

6. ACTION STRATEGY: Maximize limited resources by leveraging necessary budgets and consolidating grant funds currently spread around campus to develop “boutique” academic support services.

RATIONALE: Funding reductions was a common concern to the concept of expanding academic support at Cerritos College. In trying budgetary times, “more” is not often a practical plan, so the institution must find ways to leverage existing resources and re-imagine the possibilities of those funds. In many cases, existing budgets were not known by the stakeholders. In cases where the budgets were known, the resources were adequate, especially once those resources are consolidated toward a centralized effort. This means, however, that the dean leading and supervising this new organizational structure will need oversight and control over all of the budgets of the services currently housed in the Learning Resource Center, as well as the resources that are being expended among other support programs serving unique populations (i.e. Project Hope, athletes, etc.). This shift can also help the support programs focus more directly on student needs since resources and programs will be less “owned” by individuals and more the common property of students and the institution. An appropriately scaled, sustainable network of academic support services cannot exist with the level of duplication currently in place. Coordinated budgeting offers a smoother transition to an institutionalized effort, essential to ensure that programs are not always contingent on grant funding and become the fiscal responsibility of the institution. With current staffing at insufficient levels, efforts to maximize funds are essential to promote growth in the academic support services.

INTENDED RESULT: Pooling existing resources will stretch limited funding during the current financial crisis and structurally foster a culture of shared investment in the success of the academic support services at Cerritos College.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. What funds are currently spent on academic support services campus-wide?
2. What new resources could be leveraged to promote this aspect of the student success agenda?

3. What levels of faculty leadership/presence will be needed for instructional effectiveness and Title 5 compliance?

4. What staffing is needed at intake to ensure the integrity of the positive attendance tracking?

5. What processes need to be created to ensure that funds are appropriately allocated?

6. What long-term planning can be done to ensure that programs are sustainable and institutionalized?

PHASE II: Cultivating a Network Identity

1. ACTION STRATEGY: Define the vision, mission and/or scope of academic support services at Cerritos College.

RATIONALE: Although assessment data indicates the majority of students are underprepared for college-level coursework and the course-taking behavior of students often runs contrary to a sequenced approach to skills improvement before enrolling in transfer classes, discussions during the site visit uniformly suggest that “basic skills” is not a campus-wide priority with all faculty. Despite various efforts to support students at Cerritos College, current operations are not scaled to the level of need, requiring the institution to reframe the scope and vision of academic support services. In addition, the current support services do not yet include strategies specifically targeted for adult learners who need strategic assistance.

INTENDED RESULT: In order to best serve students, all constituents need to embrace a shared responsibility for students with “basic skills” needs. By collectively pooling energy and resources, such an overwhelming and ever-increasing need can be more
effectively addressed for students while simultaneously improving the work lives of the educational professionals themselves.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. What does the assessment data reveal about the “basic skills” challenges at Cerritos College?

2. What is the course-taking behavior of underprepared students?

3. What are the success rates in transfer-level courses for “basic skills” students compared to students that met assessment requirements?

4. What kind of campus dialogue takes place regarding course placement and pre-requisites?

2. ACTION STRATEGY: “Re-brand” the transformed learning centers into a new academic support services network that supports all the disciplines and activities critical to student success.

RATIONALE: The institution is fortunate to have the required facilities to develop a robust and comprehensive academic support network. Although the existing Learning Resource Center building already functions as the main facility for academic support services at Cerritos, objections to a “centralized” facility that seem more rooted in territorially and tradition rather than geography have stifled potential to this point. Despite concerns about centralizing academic support services, a highly visible facility with a strong campus-wide identity could be a great asset in this emerging initiative. The College is currently branding student success through the “Habits of Mind” and iFALCON efforts, and a similar campaign could greatly bolster the profile of the academic support services. A revamped academic support structure will help to demonstrably showcase the College’s commitment to the values of these other efforts. Without an effective and broad-reaching academic support structure, the self-advocacy encouraged by iFALCON will eventually lead students to experiences that do not live up to the promise of this campaign. Capitalizing on the success of the blossoming iFALCON campaign, the LRC could be re-named “The Falcon Center” and become the physical manifestation of the ideals and vision already taking shape in the Cerritos
student success initiative.

INTENDED RESULT: A fully re-conceptualized network of academic support services will be critical to invigorate the imagination of the campus community and create confidence that the perceived inadequacies of the past have been addressed and overcome.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. What are students’ and faculty members’ perceptions of the former academic resources?

2. How can those perceptions be gathered and evaluated?

3. How can those perceptions inform the new direction for academic support?

4. How can the successful campaign efforts of movements like iFALCON be integrated into the re-branded vision for academic support?

5. How can a centralized facility be made more attractive to students and faculty campus-wide?

3. ACTION STRATEGY: Review all practices within academic support service areas—including but not limited to tutoring, “lab” hours, stand-alone courses (i.e. English 33, etc.)—to ensure consistent compliance with Title 5 guidelines and the instructional integrity of the academic support services network.

RATIONALE: As a result of interviews and an examination of a variety of college materials, it is clear that faculty and administrators do not routinely discuss Title 5 compliance issues, and as a result varying interpretations are seemingly used in order to work around problems. While this impulse is understandable, various stakeholders acknowledged a number of compliance problems that will ultimately compromise the integrity of any innovation or improvement. In addition, there are other significant compliance issues that may be problematic but unknown to the campus community. In both cases, these problems must be addressed in the following areas: compliance with all tutoring guidelines, curriculum regulations, and MIS reporting regulations. The lack of
coordination among the various aspects of academic support has led to a variety of structures and operational practices within the institution. As these programs evolve and expand, developing consistent practices to maintain compliance could become more challenging if policies and procedures are not updated holistically. Building these discussions into the fabric of program development and implementation will nurture shared practices and create sustainable academic support models that collect appropriate levels of apportionment.

INTENDED RESULT: As the new vision for academic support is built, it must be created on a firm foundation of regulation compliance.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. How are compliance guidelines followed in different areas of academic support?

2. What compliance issues can be used as an impetus for program improvement?

3. What curriculum revision will be necessary in order to align curriculum with PCAH standards?

4. Do the instructional methods being reported match the operational practices of the curriculum?

4. ACTION STRATEGY: Create a comprehensive tutor training program grounded in a common foundation utilized by all learning centers as well as specialized discipline-specific training fostered through department collaboration.

RATIONALE: Inadequate training opportunities were common among the existing academic support services. This reality was of particular concern to classroom faculty that felt disconnected from the programs and uneasy about the quality of tutor interactions with students. Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success explicitly states that tutor training is a vital component for student success. The literature review notes that highly effective developmental education programs often provide tutoring; however, the presence of tutoring alone is unlikely to promote student success. Instead, researchers suggest that systemic training is the essential element of effective tutoring.
Currently, training and service standards are not consistent, systematic, or universal. Students tutored in math at one location may have a very different experience from those who receive service for math from a different program. A systematic training program should include tutoring fundamentals, interpersonal skills, as well as content mastery.

INTENDED RESULT: Having a training program utilizing the expertise of discipline-faculty and specialists from a variety of campus programs (i.e. DSPS, Counseling, etc.) will elevate the standing of the various academic support services in the eyes of the campus community. Greater connectedness, confidence, and “buy-in” will help shape a more positive identity in the emerging network.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. What training concepts would be “universal” for all academic support services?

2. What would be the requirements of the training program?

3. How can cross-training between centers foster collegiality and a shared set of best practices and a uniform philosophy?

4. How can the learning centers draw on the expertise of the campus community to support the training program?

5. ACTION STRATEGY: Develop an infrastructure and culture for data-driven decision-making that includes a plan to actively pursue data collection and evaluation of the integrated and improved academic support services network.

RATIONALE: Even if transformation is informed by best practices, there is no guarantee that the impact on Cerritos students will imitate the results in the national literature. Although some areas had limited data to demonstrate program efficacy, the student log-in system is not sophisticated enough to capture the data necessary to show positive impact on success, retention, and persistence in the variety of courses that students may access a learning center for assistance. Without such an infrastructure, programs can only rely on anecdote, insufficient to leverage the resources necessary to sustain the academic support services required to serve the ever-increasing learning needs
of the student population. Furthermore, the College should pursue quantitative measurements of success through broader focus groups and student surveys. This data should be compared with any current data or survey information gathered before changes begin. Such data collection can be utilized as part of an equity agenda, ensuring that non-traditional students are succeeding at similar rates to traditional college-ready students. In addition, SLOs and AUOs common to all academic support operations could be utilized to foster the network’s shared philosophy and mission. This conversation does not yet seem to have occurred but is an essential aspect of a renewed student success plan.

INTENDED RESULT: The College will more readily engage in informed decision-making as it relates to academic support and the emerging student success agenda.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. What does the College know about students’ perceptions of academic support?

2. To what extent can the College connect student success to academic support services?

3. What is the current state of SLOs/AUOs within the academic support services?

4. What type of information is currently gathered?

5. How is that information used and shared?

6. What information is not being gathered that will be needed in future evaluation efforts?

6. ACTION STRATEGY: Develop diversified academic support services curricula and offerings that support general college success strategies and discipline-specific content support.

RATIONALE: A diverse community college student population requires a variety of instructional models in order to engage different types of learners. All learning centers seemed to rely heavily on “tutoring” as the main instructional delivery, yet there are other
more processed-based approaches that would benefit students as well. Learning center personnel expressed the desire to diversify offerings, especially through more group learning experiences, but complained that facilities were inadequate to do so. With re-configuration of space a necessity for maximizing program efficiency, special attention should be given to providing shared spaces for group instruction and other alternative learning strategies. The College will also need to develop a culture of connectivity between the learning center and the students and disciplines those services are designed to support in order for these services to become true extensions of the classroom.

INTENDED RESULT: The emerging network of academic support services will have a strong connection to the discipline and the classroom curriculum as well as include multiple deliveries (one-on-one, small group, technologically enhanced instruction, etc.) that serve the variety of learning styles and needs of the diverse Cerritos College student population.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. How can the emerging network develop a shared learning center pedagogy?

2. How can the learning centers enhance existing and seek out new forms of instructional support deliveries?

3. What deliveries are currently being utilized in some learning centers that might have potential for success in other programs?

4. How can the effectiveness of different deliveries be measured?

5. How can learning center instruction be more process-based?

6. How can learning center offerings be better integrated with classroom curriculum?
CONCLUSION:

Cerritos College is facing a critical juncture in its development of a successful learning-centered agenda. Despite the frustration with existing “silos” and a perceived lack of progress, the energy and will to move forward with a comprehensive student success initiative is palpable. The thorough and thoughtful campus dialogue that has taken place for the last few years is just the prologue to a more intensified and focused action-oriented planning and implementation chapter that now needs to begin. The changes recommended in this plan could be enacted relatively quickly if the institutional will can be mobilized toward a new vision for student success. Although many hurdles and obstacles undoubtedly remain ahead, the limitless potential of collaborative synergy and the shared investment in an improved institution will benefit students, faculty, staff, and administration at Cerritos College in the immediate future and for generations to come.