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### Expanding the Academic Scope: Establishing a Collegiate Testing Program

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# **Consultancy Project Executive Summary**

Organization: Gardner-Webb University School of Education

Project Title: EXPANDING THE ACADEMIC SCOPE:  
ESTABLISHING A COLLEGIATE TESTING  
PROGRAM

Candidate: Carmen M. Butler

Consultancy Coach: Dr. Jeffrey Hamilton

Defense Date: 11/04/2019

Authorized by: Dr. Doug Bryan, Associate Provost for Student Success

## Amendment History

<u>Version</u>	<u>Issue Date</u>	<u>Changes</u>
Version 1	November 15, 2019	Initial version.
Version 2	November 15, 2019	Edited

## Approval

This consultancy project was submitted by Carmen M. Butler under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Dr. Jeffrey Hamilton, Faculty Advisor  
Gardner-Webb University

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Date

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Dr. Doug Bryan, Site Advisor  
Associate Provost for Student Success  
Gardner-Webb University

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Date

## **Acknowledgements**

My doctoral journey has been challenging yet rewarding. God's grace has indeed been sufficient, and I give Him the glory for any accomplishments made. My desire is to use the knowledge I have acquired to further His kingdom by leading and treating people the way Christ would have me to.

I would like to thank my husband Tim for his support and patience throughout the past 3 years. I could not have pressed on without his encouragement and proverbial foot in the pants. The past 3 years have tested our love, and I am blessed just knowing it has withstood the storm. The same holds true for my children who have supported my seemingly endless educational journey and never complained (or at least not much) when family night was moved to accommodate a homework assignment or when family vacations were scheduled around paper deadlines. I would be remiss if I did not thank my grandchildren who thought it was a grand experience to share the homework table with Nana. My gratitude also extends to my parents, Joe and Ruth McDaniel, who have shown unconditional acceptance to their middle child and still continue to pray for me daily. No words could express what that means to me.

I wish to thank Dr. Doug Bryan for leading by example and being willing to be my site supervisor and guide me through this consultancy project. You have been a wonderful mentor, and I am deeply grateful.

It is my opinion that it would not be possible to complete a doctoral program without friends who have a willing ear and ready hug. Thank you Cheryl Potter for being my sounding board, encourager, prayer warrior, and friend. Thank you Tammy Bass for keeping me straight in class and for sharing your wisdom and insight. To Razan Alamad,

I am grateful to you for always listening and for your professionalism and eagerness to take a lead in the testing program at GWU. Your efforts have made a positive impact on our students and faculty.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the advising team at Gardner-Webb University: Edwina Rozelle, Carrie Baker Drake, Dee Pettis, Kelly Collum, Michaela Roland, Shea Anderson, Tina Earls, and Janet Holtsclaw. I am forever indebted to you for your support and patience with me the past few years. Dee, Michaela, Kelly, and Edwina, you have sacrificed and continue to sacrifice your weekends and evenings to proctor exams because you believe this program is beneficial to students. I am humbled by your support, and your actions exemplify the qualities of a true leader.

Finally, I would like to thank Gardner-Webb University and Provost Benjamin Leslie for the opportunities given to me prior to and during the completion of this program.

## **Abstract**

EXPANDING THE ACADEMIC SCOPE: ESTABLISHING A COLLEGIATE TESTING PROGRAM. Butler, Carmen, 2019: Consultancy Project, Gardner-Webb University.

Establishing a testing program on a university campus can serve to showcase student learning and create higher professional standards for any academic institution. By using Gardner-Webb University as a model, this consultancy project outlines the benefits of offering testing services on a college or university campus and the steps involved in creating a testing program.

*Keywords:* academic testing, college testing, proctor services, program development, testing center, testing program, testing services

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## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Project Purpose**

Prior to 2017, Gardner-Webb University did not have a centralized office responsible for administration and oversight of testing for academic departments, schools, and colleges. The purpose of this project was to use Gardner-Webb University as a prototype to illustrate the benefits of having a testing program with supervision by one entity in academic development. This project was created as a no-cost/low-cost initiative which could be adapted to meet the needs of any college or university budget. The purpose of the project was expanded by the partnering organization to include a proposal for a centralized testing lab for consideration in the institutional strategic plan under the new presidency.

### **1.2 Associated Documents**

The documents associated with this project include

- A. Gardner-Webb University Mission Statement (Mission and Values, 2018);
- B. Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education/CAS (CAS Testing Programs and Services, 2018); and
- C. National College Testing Association/NCTA Professional Standards and Guidelines for Post-Secondary Test Centers (2014).

### **1.3 Project Plan Maintenance**

Maintenance for this project plan included alignment with the mission and strategic plan of the partnering organization, Gardner-Webb University. Project objectives were developed, and modifications were updated each semester in consultation with the site supervisor. Approvals for assessments and collaboration with testing agencies were reviewed and approved by the site supervisor. Approvals to obtain information for project needs and budget estimates were granted by the site supervisor and university provost.

## **2 Project Scope**

The scope of the project was to investigate the fit rationale of a testing program for a small university, in addition to the appointment of a central location having supervision over a testing program. The project included research of a centralized testing center on the campus of the partnering organization, Gardner-Webb University. Gardner-Webb University also requested information regarding long-term costs associated with the project plan and to determine if this endeavor would be of service to students and faculty as well as a revenue source. Particular emphasis was placed on risks including testing demands, equipment purchase and maintenance, parking, staffing, and costs associated with a classroom conversion versus building a new testing space. The partnering organization also requested a budget analysis on a fully operating 22 seat testing lab for possible submission into the institutional strategic plan.

### **2.1 Outline of Partnering Organization's Objectives**

#### **2.1.1 Objectives**

Gardner-Webb University was used as a prototype for demonstrating the importance and contribution of a testing program to any college or university campus. The undertaking and approval for this initiative were granted based on demand by several academic departments within the partnering organization for needed assessments. Approval to move forward with this project was also given by upper administration at Gardner-Webb University in order to assess whether a testing program and/or a centralized testing center would become a substantial revenue source.

#### **2.1.2 Success Criteria**

Measures of this consultancy project included the consultant's ability to

- initiate a testing program at no cost or low cost to the university,
- use the testing program as resource for students and faculty,
- negotiate and use current resources to minimize cost, and
- create a budget analysis for construction of a testing lab in the long-term strategic plan.

#### **2.1.3 Risks**

The major risk and concern for Gardner-Webb University was the cost of a new testing center in consideration of the present financial climate of the university at the time of the proposal. Mitigation was done regarding the initial request, and a decision was made by the consultant and site supervisor to move forward with a testing program by utilizing existing computer labs in order to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of a decentralized testing space versus a centralized one requiring construction.

## **2.2 Outline of Student's Objectives**

### **2.2.1 Objectives**

The scope of the project was to use Gardner-Webb University as a model to create a testing program that could be used at any college institution as a low-cost initiative. Interviews were conducted with chairs and deans to determine which assessments were needed for their respective programs as well as those assessments already being administered on campus.

The consultant assumed the responsibility for the utilization and training of current staff inside the Student Success Division who served as proctors. The consultant was responsible for securing and negotiating testing space in already established university computer labs. The project also included research and cost analysis on constructing a 22 seat centralized testing center for possible inclusion in the strategic plan for the institution.

### **2.2.2 Success Criteria**

Success for this consultancy project was determined by the following actions:

- approval from upper administration that allowed the consultant to move forward with the project as a low-cost initiative,
- involvement of faculty via a make-up testing initiative to demonstrate how a testing center can be utilized as a service to academic units,
- trained proctors for various assessments according to testing agency guidelines,
- certification of university computer labs per testing agency technological specifications,
- approved cost analysis for possible inclusion in the strategic plan for the university, and
- attendance at national testing conferences in 2018 and 2019 for additional research into best practices for collegiate testing programs.

### **2.2.3 Risks**

The major risks for this project were financial costs associated with equipment, equipment maintenance, hiring and training of proctors and testing coordinator, and project space. Costs were minimized by using existing computer labs and existing staff as proctors. Reorganization of duties allowed for an existing academic advisor to assume the role of director of testing services. Another risk for this project was parking space for testers. In order to minimize parking issues, testing was offered outside of regular school hours.

## **2.3 Definitive Scope Statement**

This scope of this project was two-fold.

1. To establish a testing program at minimal cost to the university. The scope included
  - gathering assessments already administered on campus under one central location,
  - increasing testing offerings for graduate and undergraduate programs,
  - securing professional development for the consultant at national testing conferences, and
  - training of existing staff for proctoring.
  
2. To investigate the overhead cost of a 22 seat testing lab for the university's strategic plan. The scope included
  - collaboration with university partners regarding equipment purchasing, wiring, installation, and building expenses; and
  - presentation of findings and completed proposal to the university president, provost, and chief financial officer in July 2018.

### **3 Deliverables**

#### **3.1 To Partnering Organization**

Deliverables to Gardner-Webb University included research and fit rationale of a 22 seat centralized testing center that was presented in proposal format to the university president and chief financial officer in July 2018. The site supervisor and university provost were key supporters of this initiative and gave guidance for this phase of the project. Due to budget constraints of the partnering organization, the construction of a centralized testing center was tabled for review by the new president for inclusion in the university strategic plan for 2020-2021.

The consultant was given permission to proceed with a decentralized testing program utilizing existing computer labs, classrooms, and boardroom space. Assessments were added according to recommendations from various academic programs. These deliverables were not contractual, and new assessments were added as space and approvals from testing agencies allowed. This portion of the consultancy project is ongoing.

#### **3.2 From Student**

Deliverables from this consultant included the organization and implementation of testing services for students requiring make-up testing and community individuals who required proctoring services. Oversight of testing services was conducted by the consultant and included collaboration with faculty for assessments needed for respective disciplines. Additional deliverables included collaboration with university areas for an online payment and registration portal for requested assessments. Budget accounts were set up as measures that allowed for tracking of testing revenue. These deliverables were not contractual and are ongoing as new assessments are added to the testing program.

## 4 Project Approach

### 4.1 Project Lifecycle Processes



Gardner-Webb University served as the prototype for this consultancy project. The overall approach of this project was to prove that a testing program can benefit faculty and students and bring prestige and revenue to the university. In addition, the project served to prove that a testing program can be implemented at academic institutions that do not have the finances to construct and staff a centralized testing center.

### 4.2 Project Management Processes

Progress was reviewed often with the site supervisor and included review of next steps regarding assessment offerings and a plan to manage the proctoring and procurement of testing space. Ideally, an affirmative response regarding the construction of a centralized space was preferred; however, finances were a risk given the financial state of the university at the time of the proposal. Through collaboration with the site supervisor and technology services, the consultant continued to seek approval from testing agencies for those assessments most needed for students at the partnering organization.

### 4.3 Project Support Processes

The site supervisor, university provost, and consultancy supervisor provided support for this project through meetings. In a show of support for this consultant, a meeting was arranged by the site supervisor to allow the consultant to provide a fit rationale for construction of a 22 seat testing center for the institution. While the proposal was tabled due to budget constraints, university administration continued to support the growth of testing services utilizing existing space and personnel.

## 4.4 Organization

### 4.4.1 Project Team

Decision-making power regarding the attainment of assessments and utilization of existing space for testing was entrusted to the consultant by the site supervisor and university provost. While there was not a formal project organization structure, the consultant was in communication with the administration to ensure there was no infringement of university policy and protocols. The organization of the project was dependent upon research by the consultant for assessment programs that fit the needs of the partnering organization.

### 4.4.2 Mapping Between Gardner-Webb University and Student



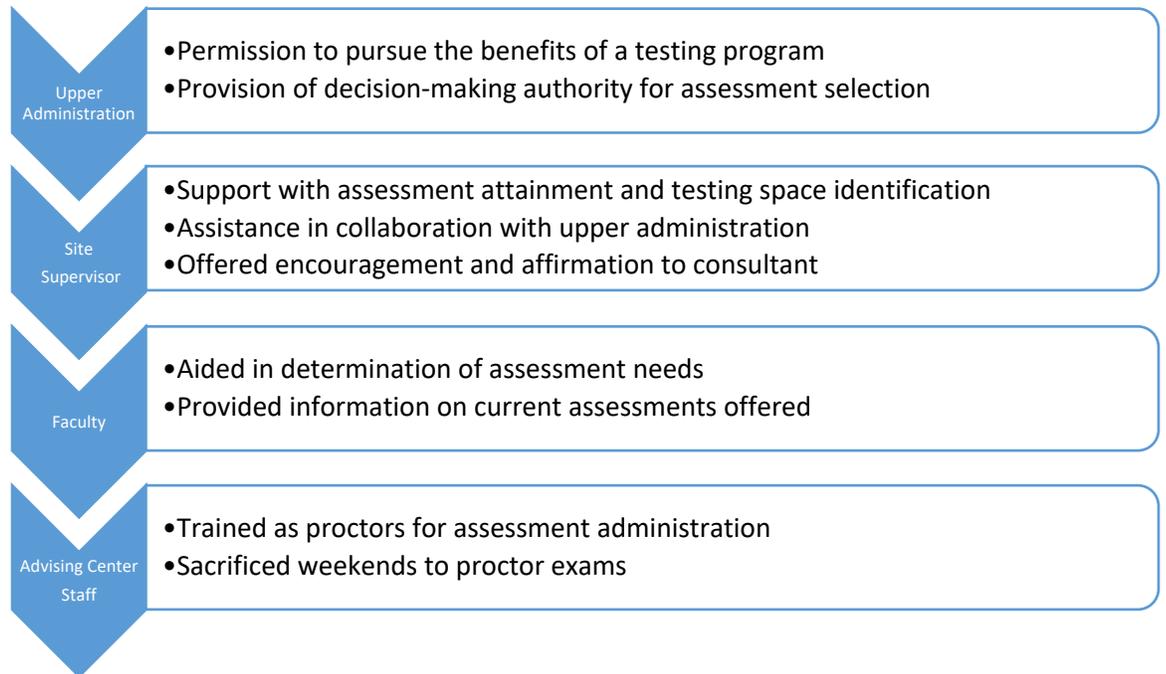
The consultant was given decision-making authority to assess university needs regarding a testing program. Other entities contributed to decision-making and included faculty, the site supervisor, and the university provost.

## **5 Communications Plan**

The consultant was given decision-making authority for the direction of this project. Meetings with the site supervisor were conducted regarding attaining permissions for specific assessments and any budgetary concerns that presented. The consultant maintained frequent communication with the consultancy supervisor and obtained guidance from both site and consultancy supervisors for a meeting with the university president and chief financial officer. The consultant also provided a written progress report to the site supervisor and university provost each semester during the 3-year consultancy project.

## 6 Work Plan

### 6.1 Work Breakdown Structure



The graph above depicts the entities involved in the testing program initiative and the tasks related to their support. Upper administration included mostly the university provost in allowing the project to move forward and entrusting decision-making to the consultant. The site supervisor provided excellent support regarding next-step decisions on testing assessments. In addition, the site supervisor exhibited true qualities of leadership in the support of the consultant and the project. Advising center staff, in a display of true student advocacy, volunteered to be trained as proctors and devoted Saturdays to assist with the project.

### 6.2 Resources

Year One – 2017

Mission alignment and proposal for a testing program was approved for project research and development for a testing program. Interviews with faculty were conducted for a needs analysis of assessments already being given on campus and/or assessments that needed to be administered. A make-up testing program was piloted using two academic departments. An existing graduate assistant was trained to oversee the scheduling and proctoring of make-up testing. Existing assessments were brought under the oversight of the consultant and the Student Success Division. The consultant coordinated efforts with technology services to use campus computer labs to offer testing at low usage times. This also helped to avoid parking issues.

### Year Two – 2018

A survey of the make-up testing program was launched for faculty who utilized the services. Due to a positive response from the piloted groups, the remaining academic areas were invited to utilize make-up testing services. Additional assessments were brought on board based on requests from the school of nursing and graduate programs. In addition, approval to administer and proctor an exit exam for seniors was added to the testing agenda. Academic advisors in the advising center were trained as proctors for all assessments. With the support of administration, the consultant became a member of the National College Testing Association/NCTA and attended the annual conference in Phoenix, Arizona.

### Year Three – 2019

Two more assessments were approved and added to the testing program. Meetings with the school of education and sign language program brought in requests to research additional assessments to accommodate students needing to meet licensure requirements for their respective programs. The consultant was given authorization by the university provost to implement a reorganization of staffing in the Student Success Division to allow for the promotion of an existing advisor to direct testing services going forward.

## 7 Milestones

<b>Milestone Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Forecast date</b>
1	Created consultancy purpose and rationale	January 2017
2	Conducted needs survey interviews with faculty	April 2017
3	Gathered current university testing under consultant supervision	August 2017
4	Developed a make-up testing program	September 2017
5	Collaborated with university partners for tracking of revenue	January 2018
6	Completed budget analysis for a twenty-two seat testing center	March 2018
7	Supervised the training of academic advisors as proctors	March 2018
8	Attended the National College Testing Association annual conference	April 2018
9	Meeting with president to provide and discuss the fit rationale for construction of a centralized testing center	April 2018
10	Attended the National College Testing Association annual conference	April 2019
11	Promoted staff member to Director of Testing Services	June 2019

## **8 Metrics and Results**

Direction for this project was partly determined by faculty and needs of each academic discipline. Project plans were modified throughout the consultancy to accommodate requests. After the institution underwent a voluntary employee reduction, there was a resulting shortage of administrative assistants and departmental secretaries. A make-up testing service with a qualified proctor was offered as a response to remedy issues with scheduling and as an assurance of test integrity. A satisfaction survey was given to faculty who utilized the service, and positive results were achieved. As a result, the project continued and expanded to include all academic areas. An excel spreadsheet was used to keep track of the number of faculty requesting the service and the number of students tested.

Records were kept during the course of the project on the kinds of assessments added to the testing program and the number of participants taking the assessments. For the assessments that yielded a sitting or proctor fee, revenue accounts were set up through collaboration between the consultant and the university cashier's office. Assessments that did not yield revenue were considered a service to students of the partnering organization, and records were kept via an excel spreadsheet and by an internet reporting system made available through testing agencies.

Records of all tests given, the number of participants, and a delineation of revenue-making or service-oriented assessments were used to show the benefits of having a testing program. This information helped create a conversation for budget forecasting and planning for a centralized testing center.

## 9 Risks, Constraints, Assumptions

### 9.1 Risks

<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Mitigation Plan (what action was taken to avoid the risk occurring)</b>	<b>Contingency Plan (what to do if the risk occurs)</b>	<b>Impact (what the impact will be to the project if the risk occurs)</b>	<b>Likelihood of occurrence (e.g., %, or high/medium/low)</b>
Budgetary Constraints	Continued project as a low-cost initiative and met with key areas on campus to arrange for utilizing existing space and equipment	Continue meetings with upper administration and present quantitative and qualitative data collected to demonstrate effectiveness of a testing program	Risk will impede growth and expansion of future testing services	Medium
Shortage of Proctors	Trained professional academic advisors and one graduate assistant as proctors	Appeal to university provost to hire and train additional graduate assistants and use retired faculty to serve as proctors on a voluntary or part-time basis	Risk would limit the expansion of the testing program to include additional assessments	Medium
Limited Parking Space for Testers	Scheduled assessments for Saturdays and after regular class hours	Use testing records to show frequency of lab usage and revenue projections in order to justify a request for additional parking space	Risk would limit the expansion of a testing program	Medium
Testing program not included in university strategic plan	Included a snapshot of program goals in a summary document for the new president	Use testing records to show demand for testing; use research to show how other colleges use a testing program to form community relationships; attain prestige as a certified testing program, and use testing revenue to	Risk would eliminate a testing program altogether	High

		maintain a self-sufficient program without delving into the operational budget of the institution		
Lack of testing participants	Investigated the testing needs of students and academic departments and schools; collaborated with testing agencies to provide testing dates and times on respective websites; collaborated with academic programs on campus to advertise testing offerings; collaborated with university webmaster to post testing information on several different webpages; maintained records of the number of testing participants showing continual increase	Re-visit and improve marketing strategies to communicate the availability of test offerings; maintain collaboration with academic areas to assess testing needs	Risk would eliminate the need for a testing program	Low

## 9.2 Constraints

The consultant encountered constraints in the areas of finances, time, testing space, staffing, and support of upper administration. These constraints were expected due to the fact that a testing program for the partnering organization was not accounted for in the university's budget plan. The financial constraint proved to be a driver for this program to veer in a direction that stretched creative thinking and opened ideas to low-cost measures any institution could implement.

Time was an unexpected constraint for this consultant. Due to the retirement of the site supervisor, the consultant was given some of the responsibilities of an associate provost in addition to retaining current responsibilities. This caused a slowing of planning and implementation of assessments for the testing program.

Testing space proved to be a juggling act as test sessions had to be scheduled through the partnering organization's scheduling software. The portal was cumbersome, and testing sessions were dropped from the calendar. The reservation of computer labs triggered a message for lab technicians to complete computer checks; however, the messages were not received in a timely manner for computer maintenance to be done. The consultant rearranged the process to include communication to technology services at least 1 week prior to the test session to ensure computers were updated as necessary.

Staffing was also a challenge due to the need to train existing personnel as proctors. Because the consultant was the supervisor for academic advising, academic advisors were given the opportunity to grow their resume by training to become certified proctors for various assessments. While advisors were willing to assist with a testing program initiative, issues were encountered due to the weekend delivery of certain assessments and the problematic issue of asking a staff member who already worked a 40-hour week to sacrifice their Saturday.

Although the idea of a testing program was received in a positive manner by a number of key stakeholders at the university, it was up to the consultant to continue to market and justify the initiative to upper administration. While this was a necessary effort, it became discouraging at points when milestones were achieved and no additional support was offered.

### 9.3 Assumptions

Research into the mission and vision of the partnering organization and the consultant's observations as a seasoned employee in academic development led the consultant to formulate assumptions for this project as follows:

- A testing program at Gardner-Webb University would align with the mission of the university as follows:
  - “to inspire a love of learning, service, and leadership...and prepare graduates for professional and personal success” (Mission and Values, 2018, p. 2).
- A testing program would promote community and student-friendly environments (Benefits of a Test Center, 2016).
  - Students who are enrolled at an institution hosting a testing center have the advantages of testing in a familiar environment with efficient scoring access (Benefits of a Test Center, 2016).
- A testing program would serve as a catalyst to market the institution's brand and create additional revenue.
  - According to Bendici (2017), institutional growth is enhanced through the revenue that testing can bring. The testing program can then become an extension of the culture of the institution.

- Support from administration would be given for this project due to documented research, college trends, and best practices with institutions that have successful operating testing programs.
  - Institutional administration that is supportive of a testing program will “take an active role in the project and will see that the necessary resources are provided to ensure the program’s success” (Bendici, 2017, p. 6)

## **10 Financial Plan**

The testing program was a two-fold endeavor. Due to budgetary constraints of the partnering organization, the first priority was to utilize existing space and personnel at no additional expense to the university. The second phase of the project included a directive from upper administration for the consultant to collaborate with the offices of university operations management and technology services to attain a budget analysis for a centralized testing center. To compare and provide more detailed options to the university president and provost, two estimates were created. One estimate included the equipment and wiring cost to convert an existing classroom to a 22 seat testing center. The other estimate was for the building of a 22 seat testing lab inside the student success center of the university.

Both plans were presented to the university president and provost in July 2018. A decision was made by the president at that time to table the decision to construct a centralized testing center until finances of the university improved. It was encouraging to the consultant, site supervisor, and consultancy supervisor that the president's decision was not in opposition to a centralized testing center.

## **11 Quality Assurance Plan**

The scope of this project included the fit rationale and resulting financial analysis of a classroom conversion to a testing center. Also included was a financial analysis of adding and constructing a testing center inside an existing building. Since neither of these options was favorable due to the financial state of the partnering organization, it was decided by the consultant and site supervisor to continue the project as a low-cost/no-cost option that included utilizing existing space and personnel to offer testing services to students and the community.

To date, the program has been successful, despite the limitations of finances. A reorganization of the academic advising center afforded the opportunity to appoint a testing services director who is continuing to grow the program. A new president has been appointed to the university, and the progress and future of the testing program will be reviewed once again to determine if a centralized space will be beneficial to the institution.

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