Rivier University’s new Learning Commons to unite a variety of academic support services with one goal

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT SUCCESSFUL college and university students have common characteristics. They take advantage of services and resources and maximize their exposure to new opportunities and experiences. Students learn both inside and outside of the classroom and are successful at working independently and as members of teams. These skills lead to their academic success today and will prepare them for their future careers regardless of their profession or industry.

Colleges and universities have found that segmenting academic support services can lead to effective outcomes, but integrating these services comprehensively into the student experience can lead to dynamic teaching and learning opportunities, according to Dr. Deborah Vess, Vice President for Academic Affairs. Following best practices in higher education, Rivier University will create the Learning Commons, a destination for students seeking services that support teaching and learning.

“The integration of student academic services is on the leading edge of trends in higher education,” says Dr. Vess. “The assimilation of these services has been shown to positively impact student learning outcomes. Today’s students thrive when presented with opportunities to collaborate in teams, use digital resources, and receive the support of peer mentors and tutors.”

The Learning Commons will be located in a recently purchased property directly adjacent to the Rivier campus, across the street from Hayward’s Ice Cream. The 15,000 square-foot facility was refurbished over the summer and has been transformed from an office building to a collaborative learning center. The Commons will bring together many of the University’s services which are currently distributed around the campus including the Writing and Resource Center, Career Development Center, Disability Services, Counseling and Wellness Center, Service Learning, and Student Success. The acquisition of this property and development of the Learning Commons expands the University’s footprint by extending the campus on Main street in a well-traveled area adjacent to Route 3.
The consolidation of these services into a central Learning Commons will foster further collaboration between students and the University’s support service professionals, enhancing learning outcomes directly connected to Rivier’s academic curriculum. In addition, the Commons will contribute to additional partnerships between departments and centers, ensuring that students are maximizing their use of all support resources. “The Learning Commons is designed to be a place where students can enhance their skills,” says Vice President for Student Affairs Kurt Stimeling. “With access to a variety of professional resources, as well as contemporary learning spaces, the Commons will become a destination for our students.” Other key resources located in Adrienne Hall including Academic Advising, Financial Aid, and the Registrar’s Office will be able to refer students to one centralized location for support.

“The common thread that ties these areas together is a focus on student success and achievement in an environment where students are supported as independent learners,” says Dr. Vess. “The relocation of these functions to the Learning Commons will enhance connections and raise the profile of the quality professional services and resources available to students.”

The centralization of these offices supports the University’s focus on academic distinction, student engagement, and competitive facilities and is consistent with both the strategic and campus master plans. “The strategic plan calls for the University to continually enhance our physical facilities,” says Sister Paula Marie Buley, IHM, President. “The creation of the Learning Commons is an investment in our students and a commitment to providing learning spaces that foster student achievement.”

The building’s design will offer a flexible learning environment with technology-enabled areas for both collaborative and independent study, private and group counseling, testing, as well as a variety of conference and meeting spaces.

Another distinctive characteristic of the Learning Commons will be the presence of University Advancement and Alumni Relations. “From the beginning of a student’s learning experience, they will realize they are part of a community,” says Sister Paula. “Rivier’s community includes our 19,000 alumni across the country and around the world who serve as resources for mentorship, networking, and career development. It will be an exceptional experience for our alumni and donor investors to visit a university environment in which they can interact with students and experience an immediate impact and value from this interaction.”

The Learning Commons will open for the 2014 fall semester and the University is eager to showcase this new learning space to students as an integral component of the Rivier experience.