

# STRUCTURED LEARNING ASSISTANCE

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY



## Our History

### Fast Facts:

- SLA was developed at Ferris, and we are the only university in Michigan offering this unique program.
- SLA started in 1993 with one course that served 67 students
- SLA has helped over 2,000 students succeed each year during its history.
- SLA facilitators have contact with approximately 12-15% of the total enrolled Ferris student population per semester.
- 90% of students recommend this program and would enroll in it again.

The SLA Program grew out of a need to reach large numbers of students who would not normally seek academic assistance voluntarily. When students enter college, they do not know how different their learning experiences will be from what they knew in high school. They do not know that they should seek out assistance early to help ensure success in college. Did you know that many college courses cover in less than 15 weeks what a high school class covers in a year?

We discovered there were some courses that students would traditionally have trouble with in their programs. As an effort to help students be successful, we sought to provide a method of direct transference of study skills and learning methods to

those content areas. Research literature indicated that students should be taught study skills that will apply directly to specific content area. The SLA program devised a way to do that.

Developed here at Ferris State University, the SLA system was designed and piloted in 1994. It was established to help increase the amount of students passing some historically high-risk for failure courses.

Many factors were incorporated in this program such as anticipated student benefit, academic need, faculty commitment, and staff expertise.

In March 2000, the SLA program received the Theodore M. Hesburgh Award, Certificate of Excellence from TIAA-CREF. This honored our commitment

to the enhancement of undergraduate teaching and leadership in learning innovation.

In 2001 the U.S Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) awarded us a grant for 'Modeling a Successful Student Retention and Faculty Development Program' to help four partner universities nationwide to develop SLA programs too. These partners include Northern Kentucky University, Kentucky, San Jacinto College North, Texas, Benedictine University, Illinois, and Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Indiana.

Fall 2003 marked the beginning of the second decade of the highly successful SLA program.



## Our Program

The SLA program models the behavior of successful students. The goals and efforts of SLA are tied to the university mission, course purpose, and world of work. We create learning partnerships that involve faculty, SLA facilitators, and students. The SLA program targets high-risk for failure courses, *not students*. We have found that some highly motivated and very successful students enroll in SLA courses to help ensure future success in their courses.

SLA Workshops are paired to courses with high failure and high student withdrawal

rates. Faculty participate on a voluntary basis and support the program design. Our facilitators are chosen for their knowledge in specific content areas. They act as role models to foster student responsibility and task commitment.

Students have the option to select course sections with SLA workshops at registration. Once registered in the SLA section, students consent to abide by the [\\*SLA Workshop and Attendance Policy](#). On average, SLA workshops offer three hours of extra, course content—specific, directed study. In addition

to content study, strategies such as note taking, listening, study habits, and test taking skills are reviewed.

The SLA program is a unique academic support program, offering students up to 45 hours per semester of extra time on task at no additional cost to the student. **That's right, there is no extra charge for participation in this program.**

We look forward to the opportunity for FSU students to grow and succeed. SLA Works!

\* SLA Workshop and Attendance Policy available upon request.



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## Structured Learning Assistance

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## Our Facilitators

Our trained facilitators have a high degree of content knowledge and effective study skills that they creatively integrate into their workshops. SLA facilitators are either industry professionals who are employed in the content area of their workshop, or they are successful upper level students who have mastered the course material. Many facilitators are highly recommended by FSU Faculty in their content areas.

In addition to preparing and offering approximately six workshop hours per week, they also attend all of the lectures for a course, attend a lab section (if there is one), and meet with the faculty member weekly. This is done to provide exceptional assistance to the students in the SLA workshops. Because they are present in all the course related activities that a student experiences, the facilitators understand which areas to target in their workshops. They know which materials were confusing and which were challenging. They also strive to make the workshops fun. In SLA, students learn course material with the help of handouts, games, practice quizzes and tests.

Many of our facilitators are planning to become teachers themselves, and all of our facilitators have the spirit of wanting to help their students and enjoy seeing them achieve success. We have an excellent team!



## Our Students

During the program's history, statistics have shown that nearly two-thirds of the SLA courses had higher pass rates than other, non-SLA courses. In terms of percent-ages that averages to be 10.4% higher pass rates. In terms of grades, that means the difference of one entire letter grade.

Many first-year students are not prepared for the college format. Many of these students have poor time management skills. They think *"Oh, three 50-minute classes per day... WOW, that's just **three hours** per day of school. I am going to have lots of free time."* However, they are sadly mistaken.

Did you know that for every hour of class lecture approximately 2 hours of additional study time is required to be successful?

Few students schedule the appropriate amount of study time to be successful. The impact of this lack of study is often felt when mid-semester grades are released. Students then attempt to make quick behavioral and study adjustments in order to increase their grades. Unfortunately, this last minute effort is often *"too-little, too-late."*

The *"three hours"* of school a day that the student was expecting actually equates to

nearly 9 hours per day when considering the amount of time and effort success requires.

The SLA workshops strive to help students avoid this struggle right from the beginning by effectively preparing students for their courses based on specific course needs.

Many first semester students try to avoid courses with SLA workshops. They may feel that they do not need or have time for this level of assistance. Unfortunately these students realize too late the benefits of having a regularly scheduled workshop.

On the positive side, those

same students are much more willing to schedule courses with SLA workshops the second semester as well as the following year. It can be discouraging for students to retake courses in order to complete prerequisites. It is also dispiriting to be dismissed from a program of study due to a low grade point average. The SLA program strives to help students avoid such pitfalls.

Our facilitators understand the importance of passing courses the first time around. Success boosts students' self-esteem, confidence, and reinforces good study habits.