About us

The Dennis Learning Center draws upon the skills and insights of a team of faculty, staff, lecturers, graduate students and undergraduate students. We support the academic success of all Ohio State students through elective courses, individual academic coaching, group workshops and scientific research. In addition, we collaborate with other units to design and implement custom programs. Our many services draw upon and contribute to the theoretical and applied understanding of college students’ learning, motivation and well-being.

Our mission

The Dennis Learning Center supports students so that they can enter, excel in and successfully complete academic programs at The Ohio State University. We help students thrive by working with them to improve many aspects of their academic functioning, including their motivation, academic stress, procrastination, time management, test taking, active reading, effective note taking, study skills and self-regulated learning. We also are devoted to the advancement of research that promotes greater understanding of college students’ academic success.
Anna Brady, lead ESEPSY 1259 instructor and winner of the highly competitive Ohio State Graduate Associate Teaching Award, is pursuing a PhD in educational psychology. In an interview with incoming lead instructor Robin Sayers, Anna shared her thoughts on working at the Dennis Learning Center.

In your mind, what makes the Dennis Learning Center great?
There are two features of the center that make it great. First, it offers a variety of programming to which undergraduate, graduate and professional students have access. That variety allows students to choose the service that works best for their individual needs. Second, the skills that the center teaches are supported by research. Instructors and coaches teach students strategies that have been shown to impact both long-term learning and achievement.

What do you think made being a graduate teaching associate for ESEPSY 1259 unique?
As an instructor, I was able to engage with a diverse group of students. Typically, 1259 enrolls students of all academic ranks and majors, which provides an array of perspectives in the classroom. This diversity led to many interesting discussions about how particular theories and skills could be applied to different domains. Seeing educational psychology theories come to life through undergraduate student experiences was really amazing!

What did you like most about working at the Dennis Learning Center?
The best part was the many opportunities to collaborate with a team of dedicated instructors. In my three years of teaching, I grew as a teacher because of the instructors with whom I was surrounded. With the end goal of promoting the success of undergraduates, our team developed unique and exciting projects and assignments.

What are the most important skills you gained from working at the center?
My teaching skills have developed immensely since joining the team. In addition, for the past two years I was lead instructor for the 1259 course. Through this experience, I developed skills related to designing programming and supporting other instructors.

In what ways have your experiences at the Dennis Learning Center helped you to develop professionally?
Working at the center has helped prepare me to reach my long-term goals. After graduating with my PhD, I hope to work at a college or university. The experience that I gained teaching 1259 has prepared me to develop and teach courses. In addition, I feel prepared to oversee other instructors.

What will you miss most about the center as you move on to your new position?
I will miss the discussions with my students focused on theories and learning strategies. The best part of teaching is watching a student make a connection or apply a concept to their life. This is particularly true in 1259 because of the great impact these connections or applications can have on students’ short-term and long-term goals.
Courses

We offered multiple sections of four educational psychology elective courses focused on helping students become skilled, confident and motivated learners.

**ESEPSY 1159: Online Learning Strategies and Skills | 466 students in 16 sections**

Students gained familiarity with tools and strategies that promoted effective and efficient online learning while bringing more interest and value to their studies. This two-credit, seven-week course was offered online in summer, autumn and spring.

**ESEPSY 1259: Learning and Motivation Strategies for Success in College | 970 students in 45 sections**

In our flagship course, students fine-tuned their motivation, time management and study skills as they learned a wide range of strategies that enabled them to perform successfully in their college coursework. This three-credit, full-semester course was taught in both face-to-face and online settings in summer, autumn and spring.

**ESEPSY 1359: Technology-Enhanced Learning Strategies | 51 students in 2 sections**

Students developed self-reflection, information literacy, teamwork and presentation strategies as they used technology to communicate findings in academic and professional settings. This three-credit, seven-week course was offered in a blended format in autumn and spring.

**ESEPSY 2059: Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner | 210 students in 12 sections**

Students who recently had encountered academic obstacles built academic skills and resilient mindsets to complete the semester on a strong note. This two-credit, seven-week course was offered in a face-to-face format in autumn and spring. It was included as a key component of the university’s SpringForward academic recovery and enrichment program, and a special section for international students was developed in partnership with the Office of International Affairs.

2017-18 was another record year in terms of course enrollment. Total enrollment increased by 215 students (approximately 15%) to reach a new high of 1,677 students in 75 sections.

68 of the 70 new first-semester students who completed our flagship ESEPSY 1259 course on the Columbus campus in Autumn 2016 enrolled at Ohio State again in Autumn 2017, a 97% retention rate!

How did students rate our courses?

Across all of the Dennis Learning Center’s courses this past year:

- 95% of students agreed their instructor was knowledgeable and well organized
- 93% of students agreed their instructor was friendly, approachable and enthusiastic about teaching
- 93% of students rated their instructor as an excellent teacher
- 91% of students agreed that what they learned in the course would be useful in the future
What did students say about the Dennis Learning Center's courses?

“The bond I made with my classmates was better than any other class I’ve had at Ohio State.”

“It actually taught me new skills and made me feel better about performing poorly my first semester; it probably kept me from transferring schools honestly.”

“I gained some seriously great ways to handle stress and also how to create a study plan that helps me succeed.”

“I learned so much more about myself in half of a semester than I have during my whole college experience.”

“I knew from the first class that this class would change my perception of how I’ve been viewing academics. My only question was, why did it take me till my junior year to discover and take this class?”

What did students say about the Dennis Learning Center’s instructors?

“Absolutely wonderful in understanding each individual on a different level than surface.”

“My instructor was very engaging and friendly and that allowed for a more honest environment regarding academic struggles.”

“Connected the material to herself and used personal examples to help solidify the ideas she introduced. I thought that this was particularly helpful — having someone who could share her experiences.”

“He told me he believed in me. That gave me motivation. It’s always a great thing to hear someone else compliment your work and yourself in a way like that.”

“One of the most approachable professors I’ve had so far. He was enthusiastic about the subject matter and always made every student feel like a priority by providing individualized feedback when requested.”
Ohio State undergraduate, graduate and professional students took part in one-on-one coaching to develop efficient and effective academic strategies.

The Dennis Learning Center’s academic coaching services provided Ohio State students with individualized instruction, feedback and accountability on topics such as building effective study methods, busting procrastination and becoming a confident and resilient student. Academic coaches tailored each session by developing a clear understanding of individual students’ goals, current study strategies and any challenges or concerns. Academic coaches then helped students learn about — and practice applying — new academic strategies, behaviors and attitudes to reach their goals.

Who took part in academic coaching?

- First generation: 172
- Honors and scholars: 53
- International: 38
- First-year: 34%
- Second-year: 28%
- Third-year: 14%
- Fourth-year: 12%
- Graduate: 8%
- Professional: 4%
- Other: 6%

- Arts & Sciences: 34%
- Engineering: 22%
- Exploration: 14%
- Business: 14%
- FAES: 4%
- HRS: 4%
- EHE: 2%
- Other: 6%
How did students rate academic coaching?
After participating in academic coaching, students indicated “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the following:

- **96%** I am very satisfied with my experience meeting with the academic coach
- **93%** I am better prepared to handle the concerns I had when making this appointment
- **92%** I would recommend coaching to other students in a similar situation
- **88%** The coaching session helped me improve as a student

What did students say about the coaching experience?
“...”
New course for international students
The Dennis Learning Center worked extensively with the Office of International Affairs and University Libraries to develop a new course to support Ohio State’s international undergraduates. Following a successful pilot in Spring 2018 as a special section of ESEPSY 2059, the course has received a permanent course number and title for offerings in Autumn 2018 and beyond: ESEPSY 2060: Academic Success Strategies for International Students. The seven-week course aims to increase confidence in using a variety of academic strategies and understanding of why certain behaviors and skills are emphasized in U.S. academic culture. One hundred percent of students who took part in the spring pilot agreed “I learned a lot in this course” and “I would recommend this course to a friend.”

Graduate School event, which provided an overview of the transition to graduate school, panel sessions with current graduate students and presentations highlighting campus resources. The Dennis Learning Center also developed and facilitated custom workshops in autumn to support graduate students’ academic success, including Managing Anxiety and Fear of Failure.

Professional school success
The center facilitated a two-part Learning and Motivation Strategies for Success orientation for incoming College of Pharmacy students. Students completed a guided self-assessment of their current approaches to studying, then learned specific strategies for improving the quantity and quality of their study time. The Dennis Learning Center also developed a custom Memory: Making Learning Efficient training for Pharmacy students and facilitated a five-session Elaborative Learning and Concept Mapping series for the College of Medicine’s post-baccalaureate program.

Diversity and inclusion
Senior associate director Lauren Hensley represented the Dennis Learning Center on the advisory board for Ohio State’s Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation program, and lead instructor Anna Brady taught 13 STEM Study Skills sessions to bridge program participants. The value of these sessions was summarized by one student, who wrote in an evaluation, “I will use literally every skill learned in this course.”
Service and support to Ohio State

The Dennis Learning Center works to advance the broader mission and goals of Ohio State by providing consultation, service on committees and direct engagement to support the work of other units. During the prior year, members of the team worked to support the OnCourse Student Success Platform, Student Success and Retention Standing Committee and Digital Flagship. A key example of this engagement is Digital Flagship, which the center has supported through instructor Irina Kuznetcova’s engagement in a one-semester pilot of the integration of iPads into classroom instruction; head academic coach Samuel Rowe’s guidance of the academic coaching team to support students’ understanding and use of iPads as learning aids; and director Christopher Wolter’s membership on the initiative’s University Advisory Committee.

Academic recovery and enrichment

2017-18 marked the second year of SpringForward, a student success program made possible through the collaboration of multiple departments. The ESEPSY 2059 academic recovery course, designed specifically for students who had experienced recent academic challenges, was expanded to the Lima campus in autumn 2017 and spring 2018 for a total of 11 SpringForward sections. The feedback students shared on an end-of-semester course evaluation included “I learned that I am responsible for my own education, but I am also responsible to find the help I need when I need it” and “The most valuable skill that I learned from this course was how to put your life together when you’ve gone off track.” For the summer 2018 enrichment portion, participants lived together on campus, engaged in on-campus events and excursions, took part in weekly cohort meetings and completed three academic coaching sessions at the Dennis Learning Center.
Workshops

We offered interactive college success workshops by request and through the First Year Experience Success Series to improve specific attitudes and skill sets in 45- to 60-minute sessions.

What did students say about the workshops they attended?

“[The most valuable part was] understanding that everyone feels overwhelmed and it’s easy to make mistakes, but it’s important to learn from these mistakes.”

“It motivated me to try and become more organized to ensure success.”

“I enjoyed learning about the different do’s and don’ts you should look at before exams.”

“It was nice to see that others were struggling with some of the stresses that I’ve been dealing with, too.”

“The breaking down of factors leading to procrastination made it easier to see what I need to change about my outlook on assignments.”

Together, all of our workshops and other outreach events had a combined total audience greater than 6,000 in 190 sessions during the year.

How did students rate our workshops?

Participants indicated “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the following statements about each workshop:

87% It was relevant to me personally
79% Attending was a very positive experience
76% It will help me be a more successful student
73% It taught me something new

Our most frequently requested topics were:

- Gearing up for higher education: 33
- Stress less: 31
- Memory tools: 21
- Strategic, confident test-taking: 16
- Dealing with procrastination: 16
- Personal learning strengths: 9
Scholarly Activities

Educational Psychology graduate students sharing research findings at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New York City.

ESEPSY 1259 instructor Anna Brady presenting her research paper at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New York City.

ESEPSY 1259 instructor Yoeun Kim sharing her research poster at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New York City.
As part of its core mission, the Dennis Learning Center is devoted to the advancement of rigorous, nationally recognized research that extends the knowledge and understanding of college students’ academic success. We support research that promotes theoretical understanding and contributes to the next generation of instructional methods designed to facilitate the success of students at Ohio State. Most directly, Director Christopher Wolters leads a research team of faculty, staff and graduate students who together conduct research on motivation and self-regulated learning, with a special focus on the experiences of students assisted by the center. As well, the center actively supports other researchers conducting studies that advance our mission and goals.

During the past academic year, members of the DLC research group published and presented work that included the following:


Findings indicated shortcomings in self-regulated learning among students on academic probation associated with their self-efficacy, time management and procrastination. As well, findings provided insight into instructional interventions that might improve the academic outcomes of these students.


This literature review drew upon environmental assessment theory to outline practical steps to help college instructors build inclusive and engaging classrooms for students of all abilities.


Using course assignments to measure students’ time use, this project confirmed the importance of study time during the week and revealed that inconsistent sleep habits were widespread.


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This paper reported on the development of a new assessment tool designed for researchers studying the way that college students work to control their own motivational processing.


This invited keynote presentation was a summary of Wolters’ theoretical and empirical work focused on better understanding students’ academic time management.

This chapter provided an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of self-report surveys commonly used to study self-regulation and provided recommendations regarding best practices and future lines of research.


Findings from this study filled an important gap in prior research by providing empirical evidence that college students’ reported use of time management strategies can be used to understand their level of procrastination.


Findings from this paper expanded the conceptual understanding of sense of belonging and further established its importance for understanding students’ achievement motivation and self-regulated learning.


This examination of online discussion posts revealed that students’ perceptions of group cohesion provided robust and multifaceted positive associations with learning engagement.

**Full a full listing, visit go.osu.edu/dlcresearch**

**Ongoing research is pursuing the following questions:**

- What instructional features support learning and growth for college students in the learning-to-learn context?
- What conditions facilitate or prevent changes in college students’ procrastination?
- How does time management fit within a larger model of self-regulated learning?
- How does college students’ sense of belonging relate to the use of metacognitive strategies when learning?
- How can self-report surveys assessing college students’ learning strategies be made more accurate and effective?
- Are college students with high levels of grit more motivated in their academics than students with low levels of grit? Do they use more effective study strategies?
- What are the more common and disruptive types of distractions faced by college students while studying?
Audiences for professional development across campus included academic advisors, faculty, graduate teaching associates and administrators. Additional tailored sessions served the Student-Athlete Support Services Office, the College of Dentistry administrative services team and post-doctoral and graduate students in the College of Arts and Sciences.

- Motivation and Engagement Series
- The Art of Referring Students to Academic Support
- Supporting Student Success through the Use of Effective Study Strategies
- Study Skills and Self-Regulated Learning
- Helping Students Develop Reading Strategies
- Communication Styles in the Workplace
- Communication Styles and Conflict Management
- Supporting Business Students’ Transitions to College with Self-Regulated Learning

Professional development in the community
Our broader reach to the community included Westerville City Schools middle school and high school teachers and administrators. In addition, the Dennis Learning Center facilitated theory-into-practice sessions at the Conference on Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Innovate: Forward Conference, Community Engagement Conference, Focusing on the First Year Conference and Battelle Educators Connect for Success Conference. Finally, we provided consultation to learning center and student success personnel at Ohio State’s regional campuses as well as other institutions across the country.

- Supporting Students in AP Classes: The Role of Self-Regulation in Student Success
- Learning and Motivation Strategies for Student Success
- Promoting Academic Success through Learning to Learn Strategies
- Abolishing the Textbook through Open Educational Resources
- Course Design for Student Self-Efficacy and Resilience
- SpringForward: A Spring and Summer Intervention for New First-Year Students who Struggle in Autumn
- Creative Approaches to Student-Led Assignments
One hundred percent of educators who attended a half-day session on developing students’ self-regulated learning skills indicated they planned to implement specific knowledge and ideas from the session.

What feedback did participants provide?

- “I would love for more of my colleagues to have the opportunity to learn about this!”
- “A general continued partnership with the Dennis Learning Center would be valuable for the district.”
- “All teachers should see this workshop and training. Many of the concepts taught and shown to us easily apply to ALL LEARNERS!!”
- “Fantastic workshop! Very useful info, both for me as a teacher and as a grad student. Thank you!”
- “This was the best workshop [on teaching] I’ve ever attended — perfect mix of theory/practice and engaging at all the right points of the presentation.”
- “I enjoyed every minute. The presentation was lovely and engaging! I loved that participants shared about norms and their experiences within their role. So helpful and wonderful!”
- “Very powerful and purposeful.”
The Dennis Learning Center received funding from three competitive grant programs at Ohio State. Funds were used to undertake special projects connected to college-success curriculum and instructional teams.

**Affordability**

The Dennis Learning Center received an Affordable Learning Exchange (ALX) Grant sponsored by the Office of Distance Education and eLearning, Undergraduate Student Government, University Libraries, Office of Academic Affairs and the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching. The project, “Increasing Value While Decreasing Costs,” funded a collaborative redesign effort of the instructional materials in ESEPSY 1159 to replace the textbook with high-quality, engaging online resources. Lauren Hensley, along with instructors and instructional designers Ken Matthias, Jacob Bane and Timothy Lombardo, presented their insights at the Innovate conference. The team’s approach, including efforts to save students $37,000 annually, was also featured in the ALX program’s monthly newsletter.
Transformative learning
A College of Education and Human Ecology Signature Course Grant, “Creating a Transformative Capstone Experience,” recognized the far-reaching impact of the ESEPSY 1259 course and provided the means for a group of instructors to engage in an intensive summer experience of designing and personally experiencing a revitalized course project. The new capstone assignment will debut in autumn 2018. Students will highlight their work on a collaborative website and share their projects with others across campus in a semester-end College Success Showcase.

Instructor development
A University Center for the Advancement of Teaching Graduate Teaching Associate Development Grant, “Supporting Instructor Development through Shared Texts and Small Groups,” provided materials for a resource library and book group. Throughout the year, ESEPSY 1259 instructors engaged in ongoing learning both as individuals and as part of an instructional team. Key topics addressed included fostering deep learning, balancing challenge and support in the classroom, and providing meaningful feedback.
Anna Brady, lead instructor for ESEPSY 1259, was honored with the Ohio State Graduate Associate Teaching Award. As the most esteemed recognition for teaching associates at Ohio State, the award acknowledges recipients’ superior teaching skills, reflective capacities and learning outcomes.

“A testament to her skilled, innovative, and engaging teaching, Anna tends to receive 100 percent agreement from students on the end-of-semester evaluation to statements such as ‘My instructor promoted an atmosphere conducive to work and learning’ and ‘What I learned in this course will be useful in the future.’”

“Her lectures interweave the latest research on motivation, cognition and psychology with engaging personal anecdotes and compelling examples. In course evaluations, students frequently remark that Anna’s enthusiasm for the content is contagious.”

Sungjun Won, ESEPSY 1259 graduate teaching associate, received the Ohio State Presidential Fellowship in recognition of embodying the highest standards of scholarship. This fellowship is the Graduate School’s most prestigious award and provides a stipend and tuition coverage for three terms so that recipients can devote themselves to rigorous research.

“Sungjun is among the most analytically sophisticated students that I have encountered in my career. His expertise in complex data analysis is extraordinary; I have often turned to him for advice in my own research, as he is truly on the cutting-edge in terms of quantitative data analysis strategies.”

“Sungjun’s proposed project ... addresses a critical need for research that advances the understanding of motivational processes, how they interact, and how they impact students’ academic outcomes.”
Support for the DLC

The Dennis Learning Center is located in the Office of Student Life’s Younkin Success Center, along with other units dedicated to supporting students’ academic, personal and career success. Funding for our faculty, staff and core graduate teaching associate and lecturer positions comes from the College of Education and Human Ecology and the Department of Educational Studies. The SpringForward program is made possible with funding from Student Life, Undergraduate Education and Enrollment Services. Generous financial support from donors supports academic coaching and workshop programs.

Tracy Cooper-Tuckman, who established the Tuckman Student Enrichment Fund in honor of founding director Bruce W. Tuckman, stands with Senior Associate Director Lauren Hensley and Professor and Director Christopher Wolters at the Ohio State Distinguished Staff Award luncheon.

Ways to support the Dennis Learning Center

The Walter E. Dennis Learning Center Endowment Fund
Fund Number: 641645 (go.osu.edu/dennisendowment)

The endowment of Walter E. Dennis Jr. and family enables the Dennis Learning Center’s academic outreach programs to take place year after year. Income from the fund covers provides primary funding for our team of undergraduate academic coaches. The coaches facilitate one-on-one sessions with Ohio State students, deliver the center’s core set of workshops across campus and provide inspiration for and feedback on communication efforts. In the past year, the fund also enabled our staff to present information about the Dennis Learning Center with other learning center professionals from across the state and to share promotional materials with parents and students during orientation.

Bruce W. Tuckman Student Enrichment Fund
Fund Number: 315444 (go.osu.edu/tuckmanfund)

This immediate-use fund, established in honor of Bruce W. Tuckman, has received donations from the family, friends, colleagues and former students of the founding director of the Dennis Learning Center. In the past year, the fund was utilized to provide an extended training period to equip new academic coaches with vital knowledge and facilitation skills. It was also used to support an additional graduate associate during the autumn 2017 semester, expand our undergraduate academic coaches’ hours during the academic year and provide book awards during an end-of-year celebration in which graduating team members were recognized for their individual contributions.
The Walter E. Dennis Learning Center is named in honor of Walter E. Dennis Jr. and family, whose endowment supports the center in its efforts to provide top-quality academic support that makes a difference in the lives of students.