

Episode 13: Saint Leo's Center for Academic Vision & Excellence (CAVE)

Speaker 1:

Saint Leo 360. A 260 degree overview of the Saint Leo University community.

Greg Lindberg:

Welcome to another episode of the Saint Leo 360 podcast. This is your host, Greg Lindberg. On this episode, we caught up with Erica Hicks, who is the Executive Director of Student Learning at Saint Leo University. Along with Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens, who is the Associate Director of Student Learning here at Saint Leo. Both of these ladies work in our CAVE, which is the Center for Academic Vision and Excellence. We start off our conversation speaking with Erica about why the name of the center was changed.

Erica Hicks:

We had students on campus that expressed that the Learning Resource Center was not necessarily a space that they wanted to come to, and that they felt like it was an opportunity for us to create a name that was more inviting to them. And so we took that opportunity to sit down with some of our student employees over the summer, and really talk through what their expectations were of that space, and to create a name that would fit that. And so, one of the main goals was to change the perception from it being a resource center, to a place that students go to develop their academic vision and to support them in their pursuit of excellence.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. Very nice. Now, I know the CAVE offers a number of services, and I want to delve into some of those specifically. As far as tutoring goes, tutoring is a big part of what the CAVE offers. And let's talk about how students can just come in for tutoring. They don't necessarily need an appointment. Is that correct?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

That is correct. Our tutoring is what I call our staple program. It was there before the coaching and before a supplemental instruction. And so students are able to visit our tutors, which we have about 20 tutors currently. And those tutors are available by appointment if they're writing tutors. So those that help with essays and APA style, MLA style. But other tutors that are tutoring in psychology, or math, or any of the other subjects, students can just simply come in, in between classes, before classes or after classes.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. So we definitely make it pretty flexible.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. We are available for students starting at 9:00 AM by drop-in or appointments, and we're open until 9:00 PM. And we're here including on Sunday as well. The only day that we're not here is on Saturday. But there's plenty of times for students to see and or speak with a tutor.

Greg Lindberg:

Very nice. And talk about the background over these tutors and then kind of where they've come from.

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Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. All of our tutors have completed courses here at Saint Leo University. They're generally in at least their sophomore year, so that they have one year under their belt. If they're tutoring in trigonometry, that's because they've taken that class. If they're tutoring in chemistry, that's because they've completed the course. They've completed it also successfully with either a grade of A or B. And all of our tutors pretty much come with a very strong high GPA. Those students also have to have recommendations from the instructors who have been their instructors in those classes. So in addition to applying, they do have to have a recommendation. And then they also have an interview with our Assistant Director of Tutoring Services before they're hired on. And once they're hired on, they get training at the beginning of the year, they get training throughout the academic year as well, and feedback.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. And then what can these tutors specifically help students with?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

The biggest things that the tutors help with is helping students understand how to learn the material. We don't do a lot in the way of helping with specific homework or specific testing. It's more conceptual. So if a student is trying to learn how to understand a theory better and how to use that theory, a tutor can help them with that. The writing tutors, like I said earlier, assist with style in their papers. Learning how to do APA versus MLA. They help generally with students so that they better understand how to perform academically.

Erica Hicks:

I would agree with that. The goal with tutoring is so that students understand overall how to learn material and how to improve within their courses. Not to understand how to, or to be able to only do a problem for a class. Because if they're learning concepts overall, then they will be able to do those problems based off of those conversations.

Greg Lindberg:

Gotcha. And I think we should also mention that the tutors generally cannot help with specific exams, assignments, quizzes, that kind of thing.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

That is correct. We don't do homework remedy. Students can bring in similar problems that we can work on, but you are not permitted to bring in homework to be completed. And that the tutor does not check that information. And they also don't teach the material. They facilitate the learning of the student with that material.

Erica Hicks:

And with our writing tutors, because no, we don't do proofreading, but we do have students submit their papers prior to that appointment, so that the writing tutor can look at that content and be able to have a conversation, overall, we've noticed this amount of grammatical errors or these punctuation issues. So that those can be addressed overall instead of editing the paper while the student's there with them.

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Greg Lindberg:

I see. Let's talk about the paper review process. Let's say a student writes a paper for one of his or her classes. They come to the CAVE. What exactly can you guys help that student with?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. Once the writing is submitted, the tutor then reviews that entire paper. They do review for grammar, they review for sentence structure, they review for flow of material to make sure that the student is staying on topic. As Erica stated, there is no red mark pen that they go through and highlight every single comma splice or every time that there's a run-on sentence. But then that becomes the conversation when the student then comes in for assistance. The student then is the one still tasked... The tutor brings that to their attention. The student though is tasked with making those corrections, especially if they're seeing large quantities in numbers of particular types of errors.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

So the tutor is there to point those things out, to alert the student with how to correct it. But then the student is the one tasked with completing making those corrections. Because we do care about the integrity of the paper being that the student has produced this document. And it hasn't been re-manufactured or anything like that from the tutor standpoint. But we do also want to provide that structure for students, so they understand what mistakes they're making.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. Very nice. Now, in terms of academic coaching, I know that's another service that the CAVE provides. Talk about academic coaching.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes, the academic coaching program is actually the PAL program now. So it's Peer Academic Learning coaching. And so as the name implies, it's peer led. Similar to the tutors, these are high achieving students, who've completed courses at Saint Leo University, and they've taken at least one year of coursework. And these students, unlike the tutors, who's really look at specific content. The PAL coaches look at study strategies and learning skills across the learning spectrum. So the most effective way to manage your time or organize your skills, so that then you can be prepared for any class.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. And based on my understanding that students can actually get a 30 or a 50 minute session with one of these coaches, is that correct?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

That is correct. Generally, most of our appointments do run about 30 minutes. Students can also drop in for those times, and, or they can schedule weekly appointments. We have a fair, about half and half of students that just simply do walk-in appointments for general overview, time management, note taking strategies that they just want a little touch up of skillset. Then we do have some students that are following our Pathway To Success program that covers 10 different topics, including time management, anxiety, concentration, selecting the main idea, self-testing. A different variety of topics that they get specific training on with the tutors. And generally those sessions are weekly throughout the semester. They are voluntary. So students are not necessarily required to take them, but we do have quite a bit of

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students that from week-to-week, will work 30 minutes with the same coach that they're coming in to see.

Greg Lindberg:

I see.

Erica Hicks:

And to be able to ensure that we are assessing those students on the front end, we do use an assessment, an instrument, the LASSI, to get that information about the students, those 10 concepts that Demetrix referred to. And then we use that to tailor the conversations and the directives for those students throughout those sessions.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. I know you mentioned the LASSI. Could you maybe elaborate a little more on that?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Sure. The LASSI is the assessment we utilize for our students who are coming in. Not every student elects to take that, but it's beneficial, because it allows a student to understand what areas they may be struggling in. The LASSI has a skill, will and chill component. And so most students do very well on the chill components. But the skill, the focus, the concentration, the anxiety, they generally score very low on those areas. So on a scale from 0-100, students who really are needing intervention are those that receive scores from 0-49 on their LASSI. And we really concentrate on those areas, if definitely if a student has more than two or three of those areas of concentration.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

As they get higher, though, 50 and above, that means that the student is really managing those tasks, self managing, which is what we want. They're self directed in those areas. But we can focus on those strategies as well. And so when they come in for their sessions, the PAL coach actually works with that student in a particular area, say for time management. And then they'll do three exercises so that the student can get some practice with thinking about how they currently manage their time, what they could be doing better, and what they can plan to do within the next week or so to improve upon that skill.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. I see. And then just to kind of clarify again, the difference between the tutors and the academic coaches?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. The biggest difference is the tutors work on content specific to a particular course, math, science. Academic coaching, or the PAL coaching, works on strategies that are intended for learning across the curriculum.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. Very nice. And then another area of the CAVE is supplemental instruction. Talk to me about supplemental instruction.

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Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. From my understanding, supplemental instruction as a program has been around since the 1960s, maybe, 1963 or so. It's been around the CAVE longer than both myself and Erica have been here.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow. Yeah.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Our person that coordinates that or that runs that program is our Assistant Director of Tutoring Services, and that's Jo Hutterli. And she works with faculty. It's a very collaborative effort. So with faculty, with students, who are our tutors that also serve in the SI Leadership roles, as well as the students who are taking those SI classes, or who are participating in SI. But those are generally highlighted for classes where there's a high drop, withdrawal and failure level. So what we call our DFWs or our DWFs, I always say it a little backwards. But basically the number of classes that have high numbers of students dropping, withdrawing, or failing the class by the end of the term.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

And for us that generally is accounting, economics, biology one and two, general chemistry one and two, organic chemistry one and two. Hearing some things. Intermediate algebra, trigonometry, calculus one in psychological research. Those are high levels of courses that we want to intervene so that the drop, withdrawal and failure rates actually decrease with this intervention.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Those courses specifically have been identified then?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes.

Greg Lindberg:

As the ones that could really benefit from this.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Absolutely. Yes.

Erica Hicks:

And one of the models of supplemental instruction as a program nationally, is that you do look at DFW rates higher than 25%. And so in some areas they range there, but some we do have that are higher than that. And so our focus is always to look at those DFW rates, and to focus on those, and to get with that faculty to try and implement supplemental instruction in those courses so that we can be proactive and help those students succeed.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes.

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Greg Lindberg:

Right.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

And then also to add onto that, with supplemental instruction, that the other difference between this and our other programs, meaning tutoring and coaching, is that the supplemental instruction, the student who is the leader actually participates in the class in real time. So that everything that students would hear the SI leader then hears when they... And they take that information to their sessions after class. Because that's the other piece of supplemental instruction, is that there's a student led study session that's specific to the actual class. Which is why then we can intervene more specifically because the SI leader has been in the class that the students are in. ke not pass classes, but in the present class.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. This program is really a collaborative program then it sounds like, with groups, students coming together, really working together towards similar goals, would you say?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Absolutely. Yes.

Erica Hicks:

And this program could not be successful without our faculty, because they are the ones who are allowing the students to be in that class, to have access to the content within that course, and also helping to facilitate those study sessions. So the tutors or the supplemental instructor are allowed to schedule those sessions with times that work with the students. And so faculty are a major part of this initiative being successful.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow. Once again, very flexible, very student oriented.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes.

Erica Hicks:

Yes.

Greg Lindberg:

Let's talk about students studying in groups versus individually, and kind of the differences there. What would you say the benefits are to group study programs like this?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

That is a loaded question, Greg. I would say the benefit for group study, group learning, is that you get to play off of one another. There are some aspects of learning that I, as a student, may not have heard or may not understand that a peer can elaborate on or explain in a different way. When it comes to the SI leadership, the groups there in that case, is that the SI leader is a tad more skilled in that subject than

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the remaining students. So you have different levels of understanding and you have the ability to learn from one another. Which oftentimes is a lot easier for students than trying to learn a very difficult and challenging topic on their own.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

They also get the opportunity to ask questions. Asking questions is one of the best ways and easiest ways to learn as well. To clarify, confusion or things that are not understood. And you can do that on your own with self-testing, but it's actually more engaging when you have five people that can answer that question and give you clarity, versus just yourself.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. Very nice.

Erica Hicks:

And I think another plus to group tutoring is you may have a student or supplemental instruction. You may have a student that is struggling and just does not feel comfortable speaking up. But as those sessions continue, that student will come out of their shell, hopefully. And then at the same time, they're still learning from those around them. And then it allows an opportunity for that discomfort to become an opportunity to learn and to grow a little bit more, because by week three, I feel more comfortable with the individuals around me. And so I may not mind saying, "I really don't understand that concept. Can somebody explain that further?" And then somebody may say, "Well, I've grappled with that too. And now I feel like I understand that. Let me explain that to you from my perspective." So it creates opportunities for them to teach each other, to learn from each other, and then also to come out of their comfort zones.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. And I would imagine there are cases where you have students who are in the same class and they can really relate just based on that with one another and kind of can support each other through that class as well.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. Absolutely. Yes.

Erica Hicks:

And some of them are in the same majors as well. And so they begin to forge relationships across multiple classes, and being able to then form independent study groups and those types of things outside of these SI sessions. And some may become SI leaders.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

That's right.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Yeah. And also from what I understand, students have demonstrated that they can actually improve their grades by being involved in this program. Can one of you speak to that a little bit?

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Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. And we, in the CAVE, we value data. So we do look at performance of students who are participating in programming, versus those who may not be performing in programming. And for the last two years that I've been here, and probably even longer than that, before that point, we do see that students who are actively participating in tutoring, in any of our programs, tutoring, SI programs, in coaching, tend to academically be a bit stronger than those who are not participating at all.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

And of course, that goes with student learning theories, that those students that are engaged, and that are highly engaged and participating are more encouraged and more committed to that academic process. And we are seeing that with the students who are participating in our programs as well. Particularly, around those sciences and math courses. And another program we have that is not listed, which is because it's a new program, are directed learning activities. Which are a combination of tutoring and a combination of SI leadership. But it's also very heavily directed by the input of the instructor who creates a packet that the student can from, that then is checked by the tutors. For those students who participate in that program, the scores definitely show a big increase. From those who participate versus those who don't participate.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

So participation and engagement in this academic process does make a difference. And we're seeing it through the data.

Greg Lindberg:

Interesting. Now, as far as resources, what types of specific academic resources does the CAVE recommend, or use or whatnot?

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. Well, the resources... Our biggest asset and our biggest resource are our student employees. So I have to say kudos to the 40 plus students that work in our space. We also, in our space, have a study area, which is oftentimes very important for students, because you need that quiet time and that quiet place. We do also have computers that students can access. Within the tutoring space, we also have books and resources. Students can oftentimes review textbooks if they don't have them, or if they're needing to refresh on topics. Some more technical things that we use. I see that we do use tutor.com for those students who are not necessarily on campus or that are taking online classes that need supplemental support outside of our hours. Tutor.com I believe is 24 hours, seven days a week. But that is a resource that we use. It's not anything that we personally operate. You want to add anything, Erica?

Erica Hicks:

We also do different things within the classroom. We have our Don't Cancel the Class presentations, where faculty members will contact the CAVE if they're considering not hosting class. And then we will go and do different presentations on things that they may think would be beneficial to their students. So MLA, APA, it could just be study skills and strategies, those types of things. So it creates an opportunity for us to get into those classrooms and work with those students, with hopes that those visits will have them come and be a part of some of the services that we offer. We also do study halls and other different activities with our student athletes. We have a couple of sports that take advantage of study hall in our space and that also... And I'm hoping that that will continue to grow, because these

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relationships have been forged probably before I arrived. And they just continue to flourish and give us other opportunities to work with that cohort of students.

Erica Hicks:

And then we also worked very closely with the Office of Accessibility Services as well, to help those students, some of them take advantage of PAL coaching and tutoring as well. And Demetrix and the Director, Michael Bailey, have forged a great relationship as well, because we also help with testing for students that are through OAS. And so that relationship has allowed us to be able to support those students through testing and to continue to grow in multiple ways. But the CAVE has taken on a large initiative with our testing. And they've done a fantastic job with that. And it's just a testament to the hard work that all of the CAVE staff put in. But right now that is just for our OAS students. And it is a huge undertaking just with those students.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

I think we do more than people know that we do. So I'm so glad we're here to be able to express that. We definitely, 95% of our engagement is directly with students. Either our student employees or the students that are coming in for services, but there are plenty of administrative things behind the scenes with faculty that we also daily partake in.

Greg Lindberg:

Nice. Yeah.

Erica Hicks:

And just the plug, we had our first, which the CAVE also took lead on for student success. We had our first journey to academic success this semester. It was a week of presentations and workshops for our students, hosted by a staff members and also faculty. We had a great turnout. We gave away textbook vouchers. It was a really good opportunity for us to really connect and work with our students. And it was so successful that we're going to continue to do it. And so we will have our next one the week of February 3rd, in the spring semester. And so we hope that we can begin to get faculty, to have their students come, and also grow that program, because it's a great opportunity for us to get in front of students and prepare them for the semester. And also to prepare them for midterms, because it's normally a week or two before those began. Well, two or three weeks before they begin.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Very cool. That sounds like a great program as well. And just to wrap up here, I did want to end on kind of asking you guys about study tips and study success. And how in general, a student, whether they come to the CAVE or not, can be successful academically, just in general terms?

Erica Hicks:

I have a few. Go to class, that is a very important one. One that we tell all of the students that we encounter, that you can't learn the material if you're not in the classroom. I would say that that would be first and foremost. Get to know your faculty, get to know your faculty advisors, and get to know your students success coaches. I'm also over the student success case managers, coaches, and I wanted to put a plug in for them as well. All of student success is... We're here to help our students. And so getting to know us, but also getting to know your faculty and your faculty advisors, it's key to your academic success. And then finally, be proactive. If you are not doing well in week two, week three, seek out your

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professors, go to office hours, go to the CAVE, begin to really be intentional about improving your academics, so that you're not waiting until week 10 week 11. At which is very difficult at that point to make change.

Erica Hicks:

And so just being proactive and taking ownership of your academics so that you can be successful.

Greg Lindberg:

Nice.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Yes. And I would ditto all of that. And probably only add one additional thing, is that make learning enjoyable. We are all here to learn something new every day. And if we look at the world in that way, then learning is a continuous thing that we do for a lifetime. And so I want of all of our students to just know they have it within them, we're here to help them if they need to have it pulled out.

Erica Hicks:

It's a great way to put it.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah. Yeah. Very well said. And I think just in general terms, from my standpoint, if there are any students out there listening to this that are struggling, that are having a tough time, just know that there's a lot of support out there. Such as the CAVE, that can help you. And students you can work with who might be in some of your same classes, or students who have already gone through those classes. There's no reason to just struggle and not get good grades, because there's so much support available.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Absolutely.

Erica Hicks:

Definitely.

Greg Lindberg:

Alrighty. Well, I'd like to thank both of you, Dr. Rostick-Owens, and Erica for being on the Saint Leo 360 podcast.

Dr. Demetrix Rostick-Owens:

Thank you.

Erica Hicks:

Thank you.

Speaker 1:

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