

Why a Learning Commons?

A more connected approach to learning, support, and student success.

We know the needs students bring to us do not fit neatly within the organizational divisions of a university.

A student struggling in a course may need a librarian's help in developing a research strategy, or might need to work closely with a tutor, or to chat with a mentor who can help identify what is getting in the way. A conversation about choosing a major may lead naturally to questions about vocation, career possibilities, or graduate school. A student experiencing any or all of these challenges may benefit from conversations with a peer mentor, a librarian, a retention specialist, or a career counselor, all of whom will be working in concert to meet the student's need.

The library is a central campus location for discovery, learning, and support. By making complementary services and experiences more visible and accessible within that space, students would encounter resources they might never seek out if those resources existed only in separate locations or organizational silos.

Some services may eventually be permanently located within the Commons; others may participate through rotating hours, programs, workshops, referrals, technology, or collaborative initiatives. Reporting relationships may evolve over time, or they may not.

What has been established is the Learning Commons framework and our commitment to building a more integrated student experience.

What will students and faculty see this fall?

The Learning Commons is already taking shape on the library's second floor.

We are transforming our former Reference Desk into the **Saints Study Bar**, a welcoming point of connection where students can find simple amenities such as coffee and tea alongside a rotating schedule of support from librarians, peer mentors, tutors, and other university professionals.

Students and faculty can also look forward to programming such as co-working in the Commons, and events from the Library, ACE, Career Development, and Retention, and collaborative programming that brings these areas together.

We are especially interested in partnering with academic disciplines and faculty to develop meaningful programming at the intersections of classroom learning, research, academic support, career exploration, mentoring, and student success.

Building the future of peer mentorship

The revitalized **Saints Advocacy Mentors (SAMs)** program will add an important dimension to this work. Trained and supported by the Retention Specialist, SAMs will serve as connectors - helping fellow students discover resources and build relationships across campus. They will also work with professionals in the Learning Commons on programming designed to strengthen student learning, belonging, and success.

The program is intentionally designed to develop the mentors as well as the students they serve. Through training, mentorship from academic professionals, meaningful campus employment, and increasing opportunities for leadership, SAMs will build skills and experiences that can grow with them throughout their time at OLLU. As the program develops, experienced mentors may advance into **Learning Commons Fellows**, taking on greater responsibility for guiding and training new peer mentors.

This powerful regenerative cycle of mentorship is more than a strategy for supporting retention. It becomes an opportunity to create the kinds of meaningful experiences that allow students to persist, grow, and thrive.

A framework we will build together

Over the next year, we will work with faculty, staff, students, and participating areas to determine how the Learning Commons vision can best take shape.

Our goal is to seek where greater connection can improve student experience, remove barriers, make resources more visible, strengthen learning, and help students persist and succeed.

Faculty will be important partners in that development. You know where students encounter obstacles, what kinds of support complement the learning happening in your disciplines, and where stronger connections among academic programs and student-support resources could make a meaningful difference.

How does the Learning Commons relate to University College?

University College is also under development, and the two initiatives are distinct and still evolving. University College is currently in discussion as an academic and administrative structure focused on first- and second-year programming.

The Library, ACE, Career Development, Retention, and the other resources connected through the Learning Commons support students across programs, locations, and degree levels - from students beginning their first semester through upper-division students, graduate students, and those pursuing terminal degrees.

Strengthening those academic and student-support structures across the university will also directly strengthen the experience University College is designed to create for first- and second-year students.

Come see what we're building

We will celebrate the launch of the Learning Commons on **September 9**. Please be on the lookout for additional details.

The celebration will be an opportunity to learn more about the vision for the Learning Commons, meet some of the people involved, ask questions, share ideas, and begin the larger conversation about how we build it together over the coming years.