

The GEMS Center - Overview

(Images of peer-led team learning sessions in action):

One of our most popular initiatives within the GEMS Center is the Peer-led team learning or PLTL program. Peer-led team learning is when students who successfully completed a course previously help students help students who are new to the course taking it for the first time. Guide their way through, facilitate them to understanding the content, problem-solving, and being more successful in the course than they might be if they just attended the class session. There is a lot to be gained for students to be in a classroom with another peer – another student who has taken the course in terms of making a mistake or not having a complete answer or not being sure how to complete an answer for example, work their way through a problem – there is very low risk - nothing at stake – no embarrassment to be working with another student and say “I don’t know” or “can you help me?” which is something that students sometimes experience when they are working directly with the professor. It’s also one of our most successful programs in terms of student learning outcomes in the STEM field: science, technology, engineering, and math courses where students typically want deeper learning, want to experience more, want opportunities for applying what they are learning and sometimes indeed struggle with the content as well. Our students who have been doing PLTL in Chemistry and Mathematics in particular, those who regularly participate in PLTL are typically doing better than students who are taking the course without peer-led team learning support.

(Images from the math lab where students are working with tutors):

Another important facet of the GEMS Center is our full-service math lab. Up to 5,000 student visitors each semester come for mathematics support across many different math courses from the very beginning courses – entry level college courses in mathematics all the way up to advanced mathematics. We have students who literally will use the math lab from their freshman year well into their junior, sometimes senior year. It is open to all students in all math courses. The math lab provides for example one-to-one tutoring, appointment based tutoring, drop-in walk-in, review sessions, practically every format a student will like. Students can come in groups for example, and get help in that format. The math lab is very good, our staff in terms of adapting to different learning styles working with students individually determining how it is that they struggle with math, why it is – or in many cases – students who just want more math. In other words, they have a high math confidence level. They come to the math lab seeking the opportunity to work closely with a math tutor in terms of reassurance – reaffirmation that they do know what they are doing, how they are doing it, and can continue to do so when it comes time for mid-term exam, or final exam. Math lab services are free to all currently enrolled, fee-paying students.

(Images of a Writing Center tutor working with a student on a paper he has written):

The GEMS Center also has a full-service writing center, staffed entirely by graduate students and faculty with great breadth of expertise in writing skills and experience. Upward of 800-900 student visits happen

on a mostly appointment basis because it is so popular. Most students make appointments because they want to plan ahead when the due dates for papers are and in that way they can be assured that they get the help that they need. Appointments last about 45 minutes. Drop-ins are also available and the writing center often takes their show on the road to conduct workshops that are closer to the students in terms of the residence hall or in the library. All students that are fee-paying at the university have the ability to use the writing center free of charge. And many students come to the writing center for things outside the assignments that they are writing for. For example, perspective graduate students like to use the writing center as they are crafting their essays for graduate school or sometimes as a secondary review to a resume or some kind of personal statement, a philosophy statement that needs to be part of a job packet or other post-graduate work that they plan to do.

(Images of a session where a tutor is working with two students on psychology work problems):

The GEMS Center also offers all fee-paying students tutoring in a variety of subjects that change on a year-to-year basis depending on student demand and need – things that we assess through student suggestions, faculty suggestions, and the outcomes we see on annual basis on courses where students are looking for additional support or the university says we'd like to see students doing better. We offer these in a special area of the GEMS PC Lab where we can dedicate space and time for tutors in areas of social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, and other areas as needed.

(Images from a Success Coaching session where a student is seeking out advise from the Success Coach):

We also have on-staff in the GEMS Center an academic success coach. An advisor with more than 20 years of experience from guiding students in this case in a one-one format towards the success they hope to achieve as a college student. Some of the features that students gain from most in the success-advisor setting are to plan out how they can manage their time better, how they can read more actively, take better notes, become more engaged in the classroom – just making sure that they are going to achieve at the level they expect to. Because, UT Dallas students come with high expectations: they've been successful elsewhere whether it was in high school or a community college or other institution. They expect to succeed here as well. The success coach can help guide them along, create a plan, and meet once or as frequently as needed. These are per appointment meetings and they are available to all students who are enrolled in any given semester.

And that in a nutshell is what the GEMS Center is all about. We will continue to grow alongside the university, serving students throughout their UTD careers. Visit and explore our website at utdallas.edu.