

Development of the Internal Structure of the BISLA Teaching and Learning Center

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„If we want to be smart, and the world along with us, let us teach people. But not teach for the purpose of teaching, but for the purpose of knowing. Knowing not for the purpose of knowing, but to act, to contribute.“

— Jan Amos Komenský

Starting in February 2022, BISLA is launching a project generously supported by the European Union Structural Funds (162,246 EUR). The aim of the project is to fully meet our potential to give high quality, multidimensional, skills-based education to our students to prepare them well for life after graduation, whether in further academic pursuits, or in professional life. With the aid of this project, BISLA aims to establish itself as the center of excellence in teaching and learning in Central Europe. The Teaching and Learning Center, which will service both faculty and students of BISLA, will offer support services that contribute to the development of soft skills, and also life skills, far beyond the possibilities of education that takes place in the classrooms. Several of the support services that will be integrated into BISLA TLC do exist already, but they will be interconnected, developed, and professionally supported to ensure their quality and sustainability. Some facets of the TLC will also be available to other university and high school teachers, as well as students from other universities, and staff from teaching and learning centers that are slowly starting to be established in universities in Slovakia. The project will also assist in equipping the Teaching and Learning Center with technology enabling interactive, intercultural education utilizing the rich networks of partner institutions. The project is inspired by the Big Six College Experiences survey findings (Gallup, 2015), that show a very strong link between students' access to support systems during their education, and their success in professional life later on.

The project focuses first and foremost on the professional training of staff in charge of the individual support services at BISLA, who will in turn structure the internal system of teaching and learning, and coach and supervise teachers, translate the insights from the scholarship on teaching and learning, which is still rather foreign to Slovak academia.

The Teaching Center will service the internal and adjunct faculty at BISLA. Four teaching coaches will be trained and they, in turn, will prepare training for incoming faculty, supervising program, and develop a bank of materials of best practices, approaches, modules, to foster pedagogical development. These will also be available on the TLC portal on the BISLA website. Teaching coaches and supervisors will partner with similar centers in partner colleges, mostly from within the Global Alliance for Liberal Education network.

The Learning Center will house several supporting services to foster student learning to its fullest potential.

The Writing Center, which exists since 2012, will benefit from professional development both of faculty coordinator, as well as student writing tutors. The processes and training of future writing mentors will

be streamlined to ensure effective continuation after each generation of writing tutors graduates and passes the torch on to the next one.

In 2018, BISLA added a component of peer mentoring. This initiative was started and organized by students themselves, and currently involves 7 second and third-year students, and all thirteen first-year students. Peer mentoring has already proven extremely effective in student retainment in the first year of studies, and offers the incoming student the best possible orientation in university education and life. The project will assist this initiative in professional training of peer mentoring coordinators, linking them with alike programs in partner colleges, and designing a training system of incoming mentors for the future.

In 2021, BISLA also launched a program of alumni mentoring that has been tested in a pilot phase and will now further develop in a similar manner. Alumni mentoring will provide a structure and support to mentoring and collaboration between pairs of alumni and current students. Alumni mentors offer either career guidance that can amount to internship opportunities, co-authoring academic articles, counseling on graduate education, and much more. Currently, 8 alumni are in an active mentoring relationship with 10 current BISLA students. The involved alumni are Samuel Hyravý, Barbara Kelemen, Alžbeta Hájková, Šimon Jeseňák, Tomáš Iliev, Vivien Slíž, Majka Dudžáková, Pavol Fukatsch, Paula Svatoňová

The Learning Center will also integrate the already existing services of academic advising by internal faculty, career counseling, and psychological counseling. Integration of these support systems and their coordination will provide students with much better access to support, and faculty and staff will be able to monitor the student needs and provide needed support more effectively. The project also equips BISLA TLC technologically, providing student Writing Center with computer technology and software needed for the advancement of academic writing skills. It will also assist in improving BISLA Library organization, technology, and services, where Library will be more directly involved in the support services. Library will also provide tutoring and services in digital research to students and faculty alike.

The project is designed in a way to ensure sustainability of TLC into the future, so that all next generations of students and teachers alike can benefit from its services.

