

Quality Enhancement Plan
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Table of Contents

Preface

Executive Summary

Introduction

Rationale and WCU Baseline Data

Learning Outcomes

Development of the Plan

Conceptualization of the Plan

Learning Theory and Research Support for the Plan

Implementation Plan

Budget

Assessment

References

Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning at Western Carolina University

Executive Summary

Western Carolina University

Western Carolina University, a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina, has a current student enrollment of almost 8,900 students. Established in 1889, the university offers more than 120 undergraduate and 50 graduate programs in the arts, sciences, education, business, and health professions. WCU is located in Cullowhee in western North Carolina, near the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Great Smoky Mountains.

The Quality Enhancement Plan

1. Overview

Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning initiates connections among existing programs to create a holistic approach to educating students. WCU faculty and staff recognize that a major challenge of higher education is the need for students to synthesize their curricular and co-curricular college experiences. The QEP uses *synthesis* – the ability to integrate knowledge from different areas into an integrated, original whole – as the driving framework for teaching and learning. This emphasis on synthesis enhances students’ educational journey and helps prepare them for life beyond college. Many students view their courses and co-curricular experiences as isolated activities to be approached in check-list fashion. The QEP fosters synthesis across the disciplines, coordinating curricular and co-curricular experiences to facilitate students’ development of a clearer purpose at the university. The plan’s implementation will impact academics, residential life, service learning, student leadership, and career planning/education. The outcome of the plan will be students who are *intentional* participants in their own learning.

2. Learning Goals/Outcomes of the QEP

1. Students will apply the synthesis concept in key decision-making.
Specifically, students will:
 - A. *formulate* a learning plan that integrates academic/student life and post-graduation goals
 - B. *demonstrate* synthesis in key curricular and co-curricular decisions.
2. Students will reflect on their progress through the university experience, maintaining an integrated (synthesis) approach to learning.

Specifically, students will:

- A. *connect* the academic and student life components of their university experience
 - B. *refine* their learning plan in light of those connections.
3. Students will evaluate their university experience (academic and student life) in relation to their future education and career plans.

Specifically, students will:

- A. *communicate* the connections between the university experience to future education and career plans
- B. *review* and revise their “Education Briefcase” to create appropriate documents (resumes, cover letters, graduate school applications, etc.) in preparation for life after university.

3. Implementation

The successful implementation of the QEP will rely on a coordinated university effort centered on the principles of synthesis. The key elements of the implementation are:

- The creation of a QEP oversight structure that will implement, coordinate, and monitor the plan
- An enhancement of the services offered by the Coulter Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning so the center will enable faculty and staff to integrate the QEP into their teaching and university work
- An integration of the synthesis concept into admissions, orientation, and other early academic/co-curricular services offered to students
- Coordination of advising, service learning, international programs, undergraduate research, and career education through the synthesis concept
- The development of the “Education Briefcase,” an electronic portal through which students will be able to interact with faculty, advisors, and career counselors; it is the literal manifestation of the students’ learning plan
- A redesign of the Career Services Office to become a Career Education Center that serves as the primary resource at WCU for major-related experiential learning opportunities

Conclusion

Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning at Western Carolina University aims to diminish artificial barriers that inhibit students' abilities to identify and benefit from the interrelationships of their curricular and co-curricular experiences. The plan's knowledge base is derived from research on learning conducted by Bloom (1954) and reflected in his taxonomy of learning, Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning, and it incorporates many precepts presented in *Learning Reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience* (ACPA/NASPA, 2004), *Greater Expectations: A new vision for learning as a nation goes to college* (AACU, 2002) and *Toward a Policy Framework for Higher Education in the Knowledge Economy* (2006, ief.wcu.edu).

Quality Enhancement Plan

Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning at Western Carolina University

Introduction

Western Carolina University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) identifies *synthesis*—the ability to integrate seemingly unrelated parts of experience from different areas into an original whole—as the driving framework for teaching and learning. Western's plan will connect undergraduate academics, advising, residential living, service learning, leadership, and career orientation so that students will explore, discover, and strengthen their sense of educational purpose. A coordinated, intentional university effort to assist undergraduate students (first year and transfer) in synthesizing their university experiences will equip them with the intellectual and experiential tools necessary to make more informed decisions about their lives and careers. The QEP calls for undergraduates, with guidance from faculty mentors and advisors, to apply the principles of synthesis and to develop a path (conceptual framework) for their university experience.

Introduction to the principles of synthesis will begin with recruitment and orientation activities. Content in promotional materials used in recruitment, presentations during orientation, and discussions in early curricular and co-curricular experiences will underscore for students the importance of synthesis in the university experience. In University Studies-Interdisciplinary classes (designed to orient students to college life), First Year Seminars, and First Year Composition courses, students will learn the foundational skills and concepts necessary for higher order learning—synthesis. As sophomores, juniors, and seniors, students will build on these foundations as they make key decisions such as choice of major, career path, or graduate school. Through first-year course experiences and

advising, undergraduates will be encouraged to participate in activities that foster synthesis, including service learning opportunities, WE LEAD (a program that links desired liberal studies outcomes with student leadership development), undergraduate research, residential life programs, and participation in cooperative (Co-op) education and internship opportunities.

Rationale and WCU Baseline Data

Western Carolina University selected synthesis because too many college students fail to integrate their individual collegiate experiences into a coherent whole that leads to understanding, direction, and ultimately, a career. Colleges and universities have attempted an extensive variety of programs and techniques to address this failure. While changes in curricula, advising, pedagogy, student life, and other areas have led to some improvement, no single approach has produced significant improvement. We believe that the problem is a result of the disjointed approach to education that most students experience; undergraduates who fail to synthesize their experiences tend to view their courses and co-curricular activities as isolated events.

The development of the Quality Enhancement Plan at Western Carolina University incorporated important research conducted for *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (AACU, 2002), *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling, 2004), and *Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling, 2006). *Greater Expectations* (AACU, 2002) discusses the “misalignment of high school work with college entry expectations,” including the lack of any formal or informal exposition of why college-bound high school students should be prepared for the interactive or holistic approach to higher education (SEE REFERENCES). Furthermore, this disconnect is often repeated in college: students

typically complete a list of courses while making no connection between the courses and they participate in extracurricular activities that shed little or no light on the importance of an integrated college experience. This lack of coherence in curricula and programs is underscored by the “absence of a plan for connected learning,” so that students often matriculate without understanding the relationships that exist between all aspects of their college experience. *Greater Expectations* outlines existing barriers to meeting the goals of higher education in the 21st Century and proposes important recommendations to meet those goals. Western Carolina University’s QEP embraces the desire put forth in *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004) to create a university experience for students that is “a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development, processes that have often been considered separate, and even independent of each other” (p. 18).

WCU baseline data, outlined below, suggest that students who persist at the university are satisfied with their academic and co-curricular activities. However, WCU’s low retention and graduation rates (compared to peer institutions) indicate that students need to connect their experiences and develop a plan that will take them through the university experience and its key decision points (selection of a major, co-curricular involvement) to degree completion and a career or graduate school.

Base Line Data: Collection and Analysis

Western Carolina University collects and analyzes information on current students, alumni, and faculty to determine academic and nonacademic areas for improvement. The Quality Enhancement Plan Committee reviewed the results of numerous institutional, system, and national student and faculty surveys, as well as institutional and national trend data, to identify the area(s) that would ultimately become the focus for the QEP. The

surveys and significant results, as well as data on retention and graduation rates, are detailed below.

The surveys administered by organizations external to WCU are:

- 1) Transition to College Inventory (TCI)
- 2) Your First College Year Survey (YFCY)
- 3) National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- 4) Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)

The surveys administered by Western Carolina University are:

- 1) Freshman Surveys
- 2) Sophomore Institutional Evaluation Surveys
- 3) Graduating Senior Surveys, and
- 4) Faculty Survey on Technology

A recent analysis of these multiple measures of student achievement, student and faculty perception, and institutional performance, generated significant findings related to student learning expectations and outcomes and the learning environment at Western Carolina University.

Administered to all first-time freshmen at Western in Fall 2004, the **Transition to College Inventory (TCI)** (http://planning.wcu.edu/Assessment/Surveys/exec_summ_tci.pdf) reported that of the 1,350 respondents, 99% of these students were attending college to, 1) acquire a good job, and 2) broaden their perspectives. More than three-fourths (79%) reported that preparation for graduate school was an important reason for attending college. In terms of identifying reasons for selecting and attending Western, the same students responded that major/academic program availability (92%), Western's strong academic reputation (88%)

and extracurricular offerings (88%), and job placement (83%) were important factors they considered. Forty-five percent of respondents indicated that they had decided on a career at the time the inventory was administered while 26% reported that they had not decided on a career.

The 2004 administration of the **Your First College Year (YFCY) Survey**, (http://planning.wcu.edu/Assessment/Surveys/YFCY_Survey_Results.pdf) a national survey developed by the H. E. Research Institute (HERI), revealed that first year Western students were more satisfied with the amount of faculty contact they experienced, opportunities for community service, relevance of coursework to every day life, and overall college experience, than other college and university students. Seventy-seven percent of Western students enrolled in a (required) first-year seminar, as compared to 49 % of the overall general respondents to this survey. However, of the entering freshman class, 45% of females, and 47% of males, reported that orientation did not prepare them for life at Western. Approximately 33% of entering first-year students at Western reported declaring a major during summer orientation, as compared to 29% who had not declared a major at the end of their first year; the remaining 15% and 14% reported declaring a major by the end of the fall semester, and during the spring semester, respectively. Forty-four percent reported receiving guidance and advice about their educational program from a professor, and a significant number of males (67%) indicated that they were concerned about life after college.

The 2004 **Sophomore Institutional Evaluation** (<http://planning.wcu.edu/Assessment/Surveys/Sophomore/SophSurv2004.htm>) was completed by 47% of Western sophomores, 94% of whom responded that opportunities for career assistance were good or excellent and 81% of whom rated overall career-related

services as good or excellent. Both indicators reflected an increase from 77% in 2000.

Ninety-eight percent indicated that faculty efforts at setting high expectations for students to learn were good or excellent and 91% reported that faculty members were good or excellent at encouraging them to be actively involved in learning, an increase of six points from 2000.

The **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** has been administered to first and fourth year students Western Carolina University in 2001, (http://planning.wcu.edu/Assessment/Surveys/nsee_results.asp), 2004, and 2006 [results from the 2006 survey administration will be available in Fall, 2006—NEED TO INSERT 2006 WEBSITE/DATA HERE]. A comparison of the 2001, 2004, and 2006 data reveal that Western [RELATE TO STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED FOR QEP].

The analysis of these student surveys demonstrates that while student perceptions of the collegiate experience, particularly as they relate to, 1) deciding on a major and selecting a career as a first-year student, 2) expectations and satisfaction with their overall initial college experience, and 3) reasons for attending college, were consistent with national norms, these quality indicators, among others, are important to maintain at Western.

The first administration of the **Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)** was conducted in Spring, 2006 [INSERT Fall, 2006 RESULTS].

In a faculty survey dealing with technology use conducted at WCU in 2002 (http://planningwcu.edu/assessment/surveys/faculty_tech_2002.html <http://planning-wcu.edu/assessment/surveys/faculty_tech_2002.html>), approximately 60% of faculty indicated that interactions between the faculty member and his or her students increased as a result of incorporating technology into teaching. Fifty percent of the faculty who responded to the survey reported that active or engaged learning

opportunities increased as a result of incorporating technology into their classes, and 42% felt their expectations of students performance increased as well. Finally, 46% of faculty reported that their teaching effectiveness increased because of computer technology.

Results from internal Graduating Senior surveys [[LINK TO RESULTS](#)] completed by 56% of the graduates during the 2003-2004 academic year revealed that 91% of the seniors rated WCU faculty as good or excellent in encouraging them to be actively involved in their learning, and the same percentage of seniors reported that WCU faculty, in general, were good or excellent at encouraging student-faculty interaction, inside and outside of the classroom. Of the graduating students who reported using career services, 77% rated their experiences as good or excellent, and again approximately the same percentage perceived that the resources available to them (career and internship information) were good or excellent. Seventy percent reported that access to employment opportunities and assistance with resume preparation was good or excellent. Of these same graduating seniors, 25% were unemployed at graduation, up from 23% the preceding year, and 27% had already accepted a job. Of the latter group, 74% indicated that the job was in their major field of study. Eighteen percent of those surveyed planned to pursue graduate studies. Ninety-six percent felt that the overall quality of instruction in their major courses was excellent or good, as compared to 89% who rated the overall quality of instruction as good or excellent. In a recent National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) study, an average of 45.3% of graduates for the 2002-2003 academic year had jobs at the time of commencement, approximately 20% higher than reported by Western graduating seniors (NACE 2004 Career Services Survey).

Retention and Graduation Rates

The data cited above suggest that academic and co-curricular programs in place are working favorably for undergraduates at WCU. However, the university needs to improve in terms of retention and graduation rates. In a recent comparison of institutions designated as peers of Western Carolina University, the graduation rate for Western students was 48.9%, compared with the peer group average of 53.9% [MORE RECENT, ACCURATE DATA NEEDED HERE/NSSE ATP AND PEER GROUP INFO NEEDED HERE--link to Institutional Research and Planning – common data set and peer institutions charts].

The QEP will address the issue the retention/graduation rate data suggest: undergraduates at WCU, despite good academic and co-curricular programs, still do not persist nor graduate at a rate the student responses to individual programs suggest. The QEP will encourage students to link these various programs and experiences into a coherent learning plan—a pathway toward intention and completion at the university.

Learning Outcomes

Western's QEP will encourage students to align their disjointed experiences into a coherent whole that has focus and direction. The learning goals of the QEP concern the student's ability to apply synthesis throughout the university experience, from understanding as a first-year student to evaluation as a graduating student. Specific, measurable learning outcomes occur through the student's on-going compilation of the Education Briefcase and the collection of data related to the student outcomes by instructors and advisors during key decision points of the undergraduate's progress (from involvement in service learning, selection of a major, and preparation for graduation, a career, or graduate school). The goals of the QEP complement the goals of programs that already exist at WCU, including the

Liberal Studies Program, Academic Advising, and Student Affairs (initiatives in leadership and residential living).

The learning outcomes of the QEP are:

1. Students will apply the synthesis concept in key decision-making. Specifically, students will:
 - A. formulate a learning plan that integrates academic/student life and post-graduation goals.
 - B. demonstrate synthesis in key curricular and co-curricular decisions.
2. Students will reflect on their progress through the university experience, maintaining an integrated (synthesis) approach to learning. Specifically, students will:
 - A. connect the academic and student life components of their university experience.
 - B. refine their learning plan in light of those connections.
3. Students will evaluate their university experience (academic and student life) in relation to their future educational and career plans. Specifically, students will:
 - A. communicate the connections between the university experience to future education and career plans.
 - B. review and revise their Education Briefcase to create appropriate documents (i.e. resumes, cover letters, graduate school applications, etc.) in preparation for life after university.

Conclusion

The Quality Enhancement Plan at Western promotes the development of an undergraduate's personal educational plan (Education Briefcase) so the student links the various domains of the university experience. Through an understanding and internalization of *synthesis*, students will complete their studies with an education that is more self-directed and that is linked to the student's own sense of educational purpose. The ultimate outcome for Western's students will be a better sense of purpose, and a clear career and/or educational path. Through synthesis, we can collectively meet the educational needs of our students while contributing to the intellectual, social, and economic needs of the region and nation.

Development of the QEP

Conceptualization of the Plan

Two significant events occurred during the 2004-2005 academic year that galvanized the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan at Western Carolina University. The first event was a leadership retreat held on September 23, 2004. More than 100 faculty, staff, students, and administrators met for a five-hour retreat hosted by Chancellor John Bardo and Troy Barksdale, then Director of University Planning at WCU, who also coordinated the event. The retreat introduced the concept of the Quality Enhancement Plan as an important new element of the SACS reaffirmation process and it began discussions on potential topics ideas. The retreat agenda included four presentations by three administrators external to Western who were knowledgeable about the new SACS reaffirmation process and the QEP in particular: Ephraim Schecter, formerly director of University Planning and Analysis at North Carolina State University, Houston Davis at Austin Peay State University, and Teresa Summers from Louisiana State University (CITATIONS NEEDED?). Presentations by the director of WCU's 1996 SACS Self-Study, Frank Prochaska, and Troy Barksdale (SEE REFERENCES) framed the context for discussions by providing information about WCU's mission, the institution's past and current characteristics, and future challenges and opportunities. More than 150 potential topics were generated during the brainstorming session facilitated by Newt Smith, then Chair of the Faculty. These topics were subsequently clustered into 23 general themes and used later in the QEP development process (SEE REFERENCES).

The University Mission

The second major initiative impacting the QEP's development was Chancellor Bardo's charge to the University's Strategic Planning Committee to review the institutional mission and to make recommendations for a revised mission statement. As a focused growth institution¹ within the UNC system, Western encounters many challenges as well as opportunities that significantly impact our ability to serve our constituents and effectively fulfill our mission. A thorough review of the current mission, last approved in 2002, and the proposal of a new mission, accompanying vision, core values, strategic directions and goals resulted from the work of the Strategic Planning Committee during the 2005-2006 Academic Year (SEE REFERENCES).

Western Carolina University's revised mission statement provides direction for the institution to prepare students to be successful academically and personally through opportunities for engaged learning, experiential education, and service. The most recent review of the mission, which took place during the 2005-2006 academic year, emphasizes the importance of integrating the whole college experience:

Western Carolina University creates engaged learning opportunities that incorporate teaching, research and service through residential, distance education and international experiences. The university focuses its academic programs, educational outreach, research and creative activities, and cultural opportunities to improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in the region, state, and nation (CITATION).

The mission of the university is based on its espoused core values:

¹ Focused Growth Institutions – seven public institutions in North Carolina identified in 1998 as having excess physical capacity and smaller enrollments agreed to pursue aggressive enrollment growth of 20 percent or more by 2003. The institutions received special funding and support provided by the General Assembly and the UNC Office of the President, to develop comprehensive enrollment growth plans, improve instruction, develop new academic programs, promote greater operating efficiencies, enhance development offices, strengthen facilities management capabilities, and reduce additional stresses on campus services associated with enrollment growth.

The university prepares students to become lifelong learners and responsible citizens in a global community. By working independently, collaboratively, and in teams, graduates of the University should demonstrate:

- Integrity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and both written and oral communication skills;
- Proficient and responsible use of information and technology;
- Appreciation for the arts, sciences, humanities, and technologies;
- Intellectual competence and professional and technical skills; and
- Continued personal development and lifelong learning.

To encourage and protect the free and open interchange of ideas, the university strives to provide experiences that foster the development of respect among all its members toward the larger communities of which it is a part. Accordingly, the University encourages its students, faculty, and staff to display the following traits of citizenship:

- behavior characterized by honesty, integrity, and responsibility;
- service to others;
- awareness of and sensitivity to the concerns of diverse people and cultures; and
- commitment to stewardship of the natural and cultural environment (citation).

The revision of the mission statement and the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan interconnected in several ways. First, several faculty, staff, and administrators who served on the QEP and Strategic Planning Committees injected relevant information to each process. Second, early in the process and several times thereafter, the Director of the SACS Review met with the Strategic Planning Committee to discuss the relationships between institutional mission, strategic planning, budgeting, assessment, and the QEP. Third, several documents were used jointly to guide and inform both processes: the internal and external scanning documents produced for the revision of the mission in 2002 and 2005 (SEE REFERENCES); the list of potential QEP Topics produced at the Leadership Retreat held on September 23, 2004; University Fact books; and various assessment results (SEE REFERENCES).

Quality Enhancement Plan Committee

The Quality Enhancement Plan Committee, composed of faculty, staff, administrators and a student, was established in December, 2004, with input from the Chancellor, Provost, Vice Chancellors, SACS Director, Deans, and some Department Heads and Directors (SEE REFERENCES). Letters of invitation to serve on the QEP Committee were distributed in early January, 2005. The SACS Director then trained committee members in the SACS reaffirmation and QEP processes in February 2005 (SEE REFERENCES). Co-chairs Brian Railsback, Professor of English and Dean of the Honors College and Scott Philyaw, Associate Professor of History, were selected in early March by the Provost and the Director of the SACS Review and the committee met for the first time on March 22, 2005 to formulate strategies for developing the QEP. The QEP Committee met throughout the summer and fall of 2005 to review and refine the QEP topic, solicit input, and to update the university community on the potential topics (SEE REFERENCES).

Conceptualization

During the final weeks of the Spring Semester, 2005, the QEP Committee issued campus-wide emails about the QEP process and all members of the Quality Enhancement Plan Committee conducted visits to more than 30 academic, extracurricular, and student groups, as well as WCU's Board of Trustees, Staff Forum, University Advisory Council (UAC), Council of Deans, and Faculty Senate, and student Honors College Board to discuss the concept of the QEP, and to solicit ideas on potential areas of focus for enhancing student learning (SEE REFERENCES). The unit discussions were based on guiding principles established by SACS (SEE REFERENCES) and those discussions resulted in the

development of a master document that reflects the collective wisdom, and professional judgment of faculty, students, and staff, administrators, alumni, and Board of Trustees members (SEE REFERENCES). The QEP Committee synthesized the master document into 20 potential QEP topics after eliciting feedback from the university community (SEE REFERENCES). Throughout the process of refining the topic, the recurring themes of student and faculty engagement, community service and experiential learning, professional endeavor, and application of knowledge emerged.

The first version of a theme that guided the work of the committee in the summer of 2005 was: *From students to educated citizens: learning through engagement (enhancing student learning by application of knowledge, experiential education, and professional endeavor in a regional and global community)*. In October, 2005, after input from the university community, the QEP Committee proposed the following topic for Western's QEP: *Academic Engagement Inside and Outside the University (AEIOU)*. Subcommittees were formed to investigate four areas identified as keys to implementing AEIOU: academic and co-curricular programs, service learning, faculty development, and careers/internships/co-ops. The subcommittees' charge to connect the classroom or on-campus experience with the wider community was achieved by raising and addressing the following questions for each of the four areas:

- 1) How does this engagement activity positively impact student learning?
- 2) How can this impact be assessed in terms of student learning outcomes?
- 3) How does this activity relate to the university mission and strategic plan?
- 4) What resources are needed to increase positive student learning in relation to this engagement activity?

In November, 2005, Dr. Ann Chard, the SACS Liaison from the Commission on Colleges for Western Carolina University visited the campus to provide feedback on our progress on the SACS Review and to respond to questions from members of the SACS Committees, faculty, and administrators. Dr. Chard's feedback was clear regarding the QEP: the current version was too broad and unnecessarily complicated. The QEP Committee revised its earlier draft after a series of discussions on the real purpose of the desired outcomes of the QEP. A meeting of the Provost, SACS Director, and QEP Co-chairs identified synthesis as the defining learning goal and, after several meetings of the QEP Committee, the early stages of the synthesis model evolved.

Learning Theory and Research Support for the QEP

A challenge exists in higher education as it pertains to life or career-based education—in particular, how an institution of higher education can build upon well-established pedagogical strategies and help students intentionally integrate their exploration of life and career-based choices. Although students may be exploring these topics at various developmental points (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), this exploration often is disjointed and students may make little effort to coordinate these topics between the curricular and co-curricular (for example, residential, career services, and advising) functions. The QEP will function as the framework for infusing synthesis intentionally and systematically within the broader curricular and co-curricular frameworks.

The notion of synthesis is derived in part from Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956). The taxonomy classifies objectives and skills that educators establish for student learning according to levels within affective, psychomotor, and cognitive domains.

Synthesis is here defined as the putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole. This is a process of working with elements, parts, etc., and

combining them in such a way as to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before. Generally this would involve a recombination of parts of previous experience with new material, reconstructed into a new and more or less well-integrated whole. This is the category in the cognitive domain which most clearly provides for creative behavior on the part of the learner. However, it should be emphasized that this is not completely free creative expression since generally the student is expected to work within the limits set by particular problems, materials, or some theoretical and methodological framework. [The student's] efforts should yield a product – something that can be observed through one or more of the senses and which is clearly more than the materials he began to work with. It is to be expected that a problem which is classified as a task primarily involving synthesis will also require all of the previous categories to some extent” (p. 162)

The QEP's emphasis on synthesis builds on Kolb's model (1984) of experiential learning, as well as on a variety of other models that have influenced this plan. Examples of other theories include the constructivist learning model of Lawson (1989), Vygotsky's model as framed by Moll (1990), and the scaffolded knowledge integration (SKI) framework developed by Linn, (1995). Most pertinent to Western's QEP, Kolb's framework organizes those instructional activities that best organize synthesis into four areas: reflective observation, active experimentation, concrete experience, and abstract conceptualization (Kolb, 1994; Svinicki & Dixon, 1990). Kolb's (1994) model of experiential learning is very appropriate for educators who see themselves as helping to prepare students for lifelong learning. It also values a *learner-centered approach* to assessment that is contextual or goal driven so the educator can accommodate the unique needs, goals, and learning styles of the student. Therefore, the QEP will focus on pedagogical strategies or other alternate instructional techniques that foster the integration of the broader learning experience within the context of application and societal factors – academic and co-curricular experiences need to interact with real-life experiences.

The Quality Enhancement Plan's reliance on contemporary literature in higher education such as *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*

(AACU, 2002), *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling, 2004), and *Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling, 2006) underscores the need to merge theory and practice in higher education. *Greater Expectations* highlights the changing landscape of the American work place – more global in nature, more reliant on “creative problem-solving, team work, and adaptability,” and heavily dependent on high-level intellectual skills, such as evaluation, synthesis, analysis, and technological prowess (SEE REFERENCES). Colleges and universities also are undergoing a metamorphosis as they try to meet their rapidly multiplying missions in an increasingly complicated society. Compounding this change are the outcomes and expectations for higher education that are desired by different constituents. High school and college students believe that completing a curriculum will prepare them for a career and advancement within that career. Employers, on the other hand, expect to hire employees who are not only trained for jobs, but who are able to “perform consistently well, communicate effectively, think academically, help solve problems, work collegially in diverse teams, and use relevant skills of the profession” (AACU, 2002). Similarly, policymakers are interested in meeting local and regional needs for economic development and the workforce. Faculty members expect students to be active learners in their educational journey, to achieve greater intellectual understanding, and to master knowledge specific to their disciplines. They also expect students to be effective communicators and active contributors to society.

Implementation of the QEP

Introduction

Western Carolina University's Quality Enhancement Plan is truly an enhancement of several on-going campus operations. The new university-wide emphasis on *synthesis*, and the connection of this concept to specific learning outcomes, is the enhancement. The QEP links several campus support offices that have traditionally been treated as separate in mission, services offered, and administrative structure. As the implementation of the QEP integrates the work of these various campus offices it will serve as an example of the kind of synthesis thinking and learning we aim to foster among our students.

The areas that will feel the greatest impact of the QEP will be student orientation, advising, the faculty center, and career services. As students progress through the university, the key areas of student orientation (introduction of the QEP), advising (reinforcing the QEP), and career services (applying the QEP to student progress at graduation and beyond) will be critical in applying and fostering synthesis. The Myron L. Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning will serve a crucial role in training faculty and staff on the QEP; the center will also continually introduce the plan to new faculty members as they arrive at WCU.

This implementation section will discuss:

- Key Components of the Plan
- Action Plan and Timeline
- QEP Budget

Key Components of the Plan

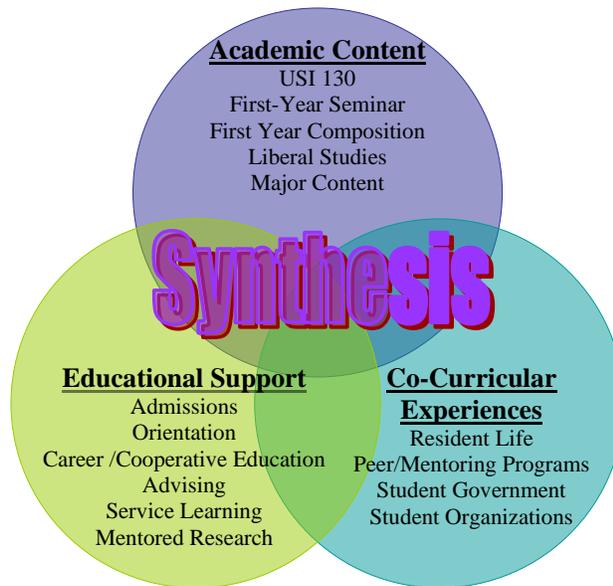
There are three key components for the implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan:

- I. Oversight of the Plan
- II. Training of Faculty and Staff
- III. Learning Goals and Specific Learning Outcomes

Comment: Should the section on learning outcomes come before the training section?

I. Oversight of the Plan

Administrative oversight of the QEP will be provided by the Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs (AVCAA) under the direction of the Office of the Provost. The AVCAA will chair a Quality Enhancement Plan Implementation Committee and will appoint chairs for subcommittees that emerge from the larger group. The entire QEP Implementation Committee will meet at least once a semester, or more frequently as needed. The figure below represents campus constituencies that tie into the synthesis plan and that will be represented on the Implementation Committee.



Working with the Provost and the Chair of the Faculty Senate, the AVCAA will form a committee consisting of:

- Director of Assessment
- Director of University Planning
- Chair of the Faculty Senate or designee
- A faculty representative from each of the four academic colleges (Applied Sciences, Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education/Allied Professions) and other new colleges as they are established. Faculty representatives will be appointed by the Provost in consultation with the college dean.
- A Student Affairs division representative (Vice Chancellor's appointment)
- The Director of the Coulter Faculty Center
- New Faculty Fellow of the Coulter Faculty Center
- Associate CIO, IT Division

- Director of Orientation
- Director of Advising and Student Success
- Director of Career Services
- Coordinator of USI 130
- Two Students (appointed by the QEP Committee)
- Director of Service Learning
- A representative from Residential Living appointed by the Director of RL
- A representative from the Graduate School appointed by the Graduate Dean.
- Three to four members of the original QEP Committee

Comment: Criteria for selection?
Length of terms?

Comment: Length of terms? Will these members be replaced if they leave WCU?

Comment: This was inserted to achieve continuity with the current committee. Given the proposed membership of the new committee, this may be unnecessary.

The AVCAA and the members of the committee may opt to expand the size of the committee as they deem necessary.

The committee will advise and assist the Chancellor and Provost on the QEP implementation and oversight. Specific areas of emphasis by the committee include:

- Faculty and staff training in preparation for the QEP.
- Phasing in the QEP and meeting deadlines set forth in the plan.
- Monitoring the use of resources and the budget set forth in the plan.
- Assessing the implementation and success of the plan.
- Recommending adjustments to the plan as a result of ongoing assessment.
- Preparing for the next SACS review of the plan, including writing the five-year Impact Report, based on assessment of the Plan's implementation.
- Creation of a Training/Resource Manual and coordination of training activities with the Coulter Faculty Center.

The committee will establish sub-committees in the following areas:

- QEP IT Services Sub-Committee: charged with working with the Implementation Committee and specifically creating and monitoring the Education Briefcase, co-curricular transcript, assessment tools, QEP Web site, and other aspects of the QEP requiring technological solutions/infrastructure.
- QEP Assessment Sub-Committee: charged with assessing the implementation and success of the plan, and making recommendations for improving the plan.
- The AVCAA will establish additional sub-committees as necessary.

II. Training of Faculty and Staff

The role of the Myron L. Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning will be critical in the implementation of synthesis learning for the QEP. The center's role will be to assist with faculty training and the integration of synthesis content and learning

activities into syllabi and curricula. A curriculum design specialist will be responsible for conducting research, providing resources, and leading training on synthesis. In addition, summer retreats devoted to the QEP (led by early adopter faculty) will facilitate the incorporation of synthesis learning in the curriculum. These retreats will be modeled on Faculty Center summer retreats already in place. Faculty workshops and a Faculty Learning Community will be sponsored during the academic year and synthesis-related activities will also be integrated into other Faculty Center events.

In consultation with the QEP Implementation Committee, the Faculty Center will support:

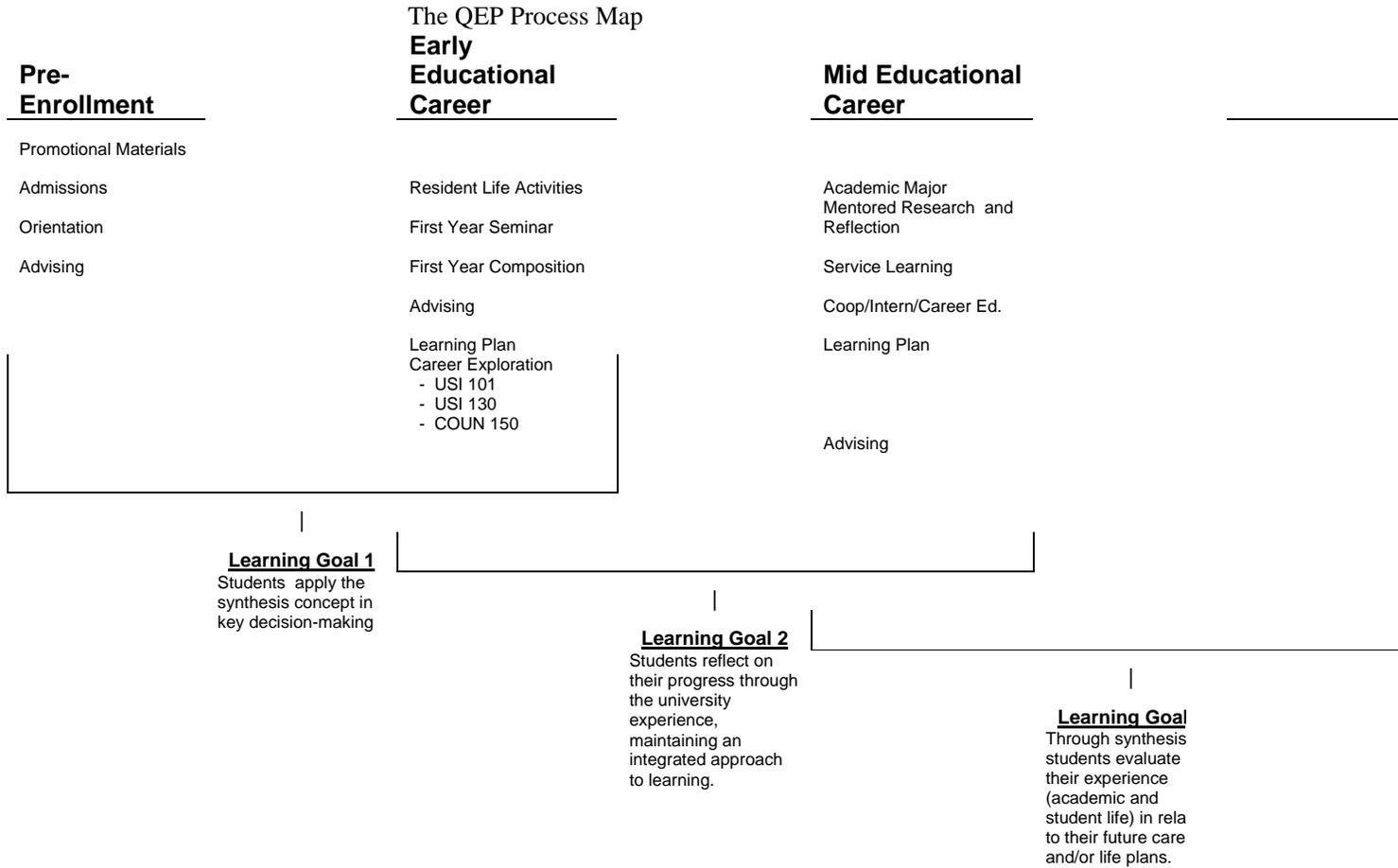
- Development of a training/resource manual based on the QEP for faculty and staff.
- The selection of on-campus personnel who will assist in QEP training.
- The emphasis on on-going training of key personnel (such as advisors) on the QEP.
- Identifying relevant consultants and advisors external to WCU to enhance training efforts.

Comment: Should faculty representatives to Advising Career Education Center be mentioned in this list?

III. Learning Goals and Outcomes

The process map below illustrates the students' progress through the QEP and the connection of learning goals (with specific outcomes) to general timeframes in undergraduate life. **“Pre-Enrollment”** covers the period from early recruitment through to the arrival on campus. **“Early Educational Career”** includes first year experiences. **“Mid Educational Career”** covers the sophomore and junior years, and **“Late Educational Career”** may commence as early as the junior year, but typically involves the senior year, graduation, and the beginning of the next steps (career or graduate school). Of course, not all traditional undergraduates will follow this path so neatly (for example, some high school graduates arrive with AA degrees from community colleges

or some seniors remain as seniors for two or more years). However, the process map suggests the typical trend.



Education Briefcase

The student's progress through the QEP, as outlined in the above process map, will be monitored and assessed through the *Education Briefcase*. The purpose of the Education Briefcase is to serve as a collaborative space where students and university personnel share information to facilitate the holistic, personal development of each student's educational career. Students will use the briefcase to chart educational progress, social activities, experiential learning, and future educational/career plans. The briefcase will be a repository for sharing learning plans, resumes, extracurricular transcripts, templates, and other synthesis documentation. The evolving nature of the briefcase will also reflect revisions and changes to each student's educational goals. The Educational Briefcase will be the literal manifestation of the student's learning plan and will include information that reflects the evolution of the students' plan as they complete their degree objectives.

PRE-ENROLLMENT/EARLY EDUCATIONAL CAREER

Goal 1: Students will apply the synthesis concept in key decision-making.
Specific Learning Outcomes; students will:

1. Formulate a learning plan that integrates academic/student life and post-graduation goals.
2. Demonstrate synthesis in key curricular and co-curricular decisions.

Emphasis areas in student's development under Goal 1: Pre-enrollment and early enrollment (recruitment, admission, first-year, and sophomore years).

Co-Curricular Areas

Enrollment Management

The concepts of *synthesis* and *intentional learning* will be first introduced and defined as part of the Enrollment Management process beginning with recruitment and

orientation activities. Emphasis of these concepts will continue as students move into the university. With the assistance of admissions' counselors, orientation leaders, career advisors, faculty, and residence life mentors, students will begin crafting the individual components that will form their Education Briefcase, including their learning plan. Through guided reflection and interaction with faculty and staff, students will learn to integrate academics, co-curricular activities, and work experiences toward their career goal.

Admissions

As the initial point of contact, Admissions will introduce the concept of synthesis to prospective students and their parents, as well as high school and community college faculty and staff. Admissions staff members will reinforce the QEP as they frequently interact with WCU faculty, staff, and administrators across campus.

Orientation

The Orientation Program introduces new students to the college classroom and will set the tone for the enhancement of learning that occurs as a result of promoting synthesis. Orientation staff, including student counselors, faculty, and administrators will introduce the synthesis concept to new students to prepare them for the WCU emphasis on synthesis. The implementation of the QEP will capitalize on existing elements of orientation and will foster the development of new initiatives, such as teaching students to make connections between curricular and co-curricular experiences, providing them with real-life examples of integrated learning and its benefits, and fostering self-awareness by administering career and personality inventories.

Advising

The QEP builds on the present philosophy of the Advising Center, though the specific emphasis of synthesis is new. Guided by university advisors (for undeclared students) and faculty advisors (once students have declared a major), students will develop an Education Briefcase (described above). The student's briefcase incorporates academic and co-curricular experiences such as involvement in residence life programs, internships, co-ops, service learning opportunities, undergraduate research, and international study.

Western students work with two professional advising systems. Entering students and those who have not declared a major work with a college advisor from the Advising Center. Once students declare a major, they work with an academic advisor within their academic program. The Advising Center will continue to emphasize advisor-advisee relationships that support the integration of academic and co-curricular experiences, with special attention to student interests, life goals, and the student's career/graduate school focus. Academic advisors encourage these same goals within a disciplinary or professional context.

Student Life/Residential Living

Staff in Residential Living and other aspects of student life, trained in the principles of the QEP, will facilitate students' reflection on how student life relates to academic and career plans. Hall program meetings, which already are regularly conducted throughout the semester, will provide the structure for this reflection to occur. Resident assistants, peer mentors, and orientation counselors will implement a collaborative initiative, the First Six

Weeks Program, based on Boyer's Principles of Community for students (SEE REFERENCES).

Comment: Should the principles be listed here? If not, will the reviewer have to stop reading to find out what these area and then make a decision about their relevancy?

Academic Areas

Liberal Studies

Western Carolina University's QEP builds on existing efforts to enhance our students' educational experience. For example, in developing the current Liberal Studies program in 1998, the General Education Review Committee proposed that students should be able to:

- Locate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information
- Have the ability to determine behaviors and choices that affect lifelong learning and well-being
- Understand the interrelatedness of past and current social institutions and human experiences

Given the proposed integration set forth in the Liberal Studies Program document (SEE REFERENCES) and the emphasis on synthesis in the QEP, faculty members teaching in the Liberal Studies Program will enhance their ability to incorporate synthesis in course instruction and assignments. Specifically, the QEP will build on the Liberal Studies Program by emphasizing synthesis in the following areas:

- First Year Seminar (three-hour seminars that introduce college academics).

The first year seminar was designed with the integration of knowledge as a guiding principle. It was also designed to introduce the intellectual world of the university to students and to underscore the notion that liberal education is not restricted by the boundaries of academic disciplines and specializations of professions.

- First-Year Composition (three-hour writing seminar). Synthesis is an integral part of any and all writing tasks. When students write, they synthesize their thoughts with their experiences, their own ideas with others', and/or one source with another source. First-Year Composition teaches synthesis skills, and asks students to practice those skills.
- Upper Level Perspective courses. The upper level perspective requirement encourages synthesis in several ways. First, these junior-senior courses outside the student's major promote comparison of research methodologies, scholarly inquiries, and disciplinary differences. Second, the Liberal Studies Program encourages faculty to develop "new upper level Liberal Studies courses that involve broad, even interdisciplinary, experiences" (SEE REFERENCES).

USI and Counseling Courses

In addition to Liberal Studies courses, many WCU students enroll in USI 130 (USI 101 for Honors students) and COUN 150 (one-hour seminars designed to introduce students to WCU and aspects of major and career exploration) and courses in the Student Affairs Leadership curriculum. Instructors of these courses will be trained to model and integrate QEP/synthesis concepts in their courses.

EARLY AND MID EDUCATIONAL CAREER

Goal 2: Students will reflect on their progress through the university experience, maintaining an integrated (synthesis) approach to learning.

Specific Learning Outcomes; students will:

1. Connect the academic and student life components of their university experience
2. Refine their learning plan in light of those connections.

Emphasis areas in student's development under Goal 2: Mid Educational Career (sophomore, junior years).

Co-Curricular Areas

Advising-Career Education Center

A plan to integrate key support offices in the form of a new Advising-Career Education Center will facilitate implementation of the QEP. The new Center will house Academic Advising, Career Services, Service Learning, and International Programs, giving students access to advisors, career counselors, and a faculty representative from each of the academic colleges. Additionally, information regarding on-campus work experiences, service learning experiences, internships and cooperative education opportunities (both on and off campus, and within the United States and overseas), will be available in conjunction with qualified staff to assist students in reflecting on and applying synthesis to their educational journey and career goals.

Advising

Advisors will routinely confer individually with students about their learning plan to facilitate students' self-reflection on and synthesis of the different components of the Education Briefcase. Upon declaration of a major, students will confer with major advisors to integrate academic and co-curricular experiences along with other activities that prepare undergraduates for graduation and beyond.

Service Learning

Service Learning staff members will be trained in the principles of the QEP to enhance existing efforts to focus students on integrating academic, experiential, and service learning experiences with career plans. The Service Learning Department already

promotes and supports integrated learning by encouraging faculty to combine academic outcomes with civic, social, and career-related outcomes through the service-learning component of courses.

Faculty Service Learning Fellows will receive training in the effective use of reflection methods and tools to gauge student learning and development outcomes. They discuss and document student knowledge, skills, attitude change, and accomplishments resulting from community service and volunteer experiences in relation to coursework. These activities will be enhanced by implementing the QEP.

The Service Learning Department will produce a Reflection Manual for students who will be trained as Service Learning Reflection Facilitators. Detailed reflection activities and procedures will be included in the manual, which will be completed by the beginning of the spring 2007 semester. Reflection Facilitators will be recruited and trained by the beginning of the fall 2007 semester.

Comment: This section makes it sound like Reflection process would only be done by students who have a service learning experience???

Co-ops/Internships/Career Education

Advisors, Career Services staff, and department faculty will help students to participate in on- and off-campus internships and co-ops that will support students' academic and career goals.

A new way of conceptualizing the educational experience of WCU students is critical as the university focuses on enhancing individual student learning through synthesis of coursework and other college experiences. The co-op/internship is a semester(s) long experience where students participate in a job or activity that is directly related to their major. For many, this is a first experience in a "real" job. As a result of participating in the workplace, students will experience the application of their

coursework and its relevance to their chosen discipline. After their experience, students return to school with an understanding of what they need to know and how that knowledge contributes to their educational and career goals.

Information Technology (IT) Services; the Education Briefcase

Advisors will be assisted by the co-curricular transcript developed by Student Affairs and supported by IT; the QEP IT Services Sub-Committee will monitor progress of the electronic aspects of the plan. The purpose of the Education Briefcase is to serve as a collaborative space where students, their advisors, career counselors, and instructors can work together in helping each student to develop artifacts that indicate the student's progress through the synthesis/QEP process.

Comment: Can a transcript provide assistance? Or does it provide useful information?

WCU, as part of its technology infrastructure upgrade, is actively creating systems to support the student, faculty, advisor, and career counselor interaction. The result will be the adoption of Microsoft's Share Point Education Briefcase portal system in conjunction with existing enterprise systems. A new staff position will be created to maintain and manage access to the shared Education Briefcase. The concept is that every student will have an Education Briefcase that is accessible by the student, his or her advisor, select faculty members, and career counselors.

Comment: How long will student have access? Time period following graduation?

Academic Areas

Liberal Studies

Faculty teaching Liberal Studies courses will be trained in the precepts of the QEP by Faculty Center staff; Liberal Studies faculty members will emphasize synthesis in courses whenever appropriate or practical. The integration of knowledge will be

particularly evident in the Upper Level Perspectives courses which promote liberal studies as a life-long endeavor.

Foundational/Content Knowledge

When students declare their major, they are also choosing a group of faculty to supervise their education. Professors in the major department or academic program interact with students in multiple capacities. They teach, serve as academic advisors, supervise theses and research projects, introduce students to the discipline/profession, and often assist with internships and job placements. The breadth of these interactions encourages faculty and students to see educational experiences within the major as an integrated whole.

The Quality Enhancement Plan acknowledges the integrated learning that already takes place. This plan will foster the replication of successful integrated learning practices as appropriate and will encourage the similar integration of the student's complete educational experience. The Education Briefcase will provide faculty advisors with useful information to assist with academic, co-curricular, and career advising. It will also provide a convenient repository for notes from advising sessions, examples of student work, and other materials.

Program faculty members have many opportunities to guide students in connecting course requirements with professional expectations. The QEP will serve as a resource for these faculty members through training and consultation available from the Faculty Center and other university offices such as Service Learning and Career Services.

Western Carolina recently initiated the Integration of Learning Award to support innovative programming that bridges the common divide between the divisions of

academic affairs and student affairs. This program will be expanded in recognition of the quality of applications submitted annually. Its expansion will also foster the development of additional integrative activities.

Comment: How will these award-winning methods be spread across campus?

Undergraduate Research

Mentored research or creative work at the undergraduate level has been encouraged at Western Carolina University for many years. Students currently present their research in a variety of local, regional, and national venues including the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. In 2006, WCU was second in the nation in terms of presentations at this conference.

The presentation of research or creative works in public settings takes student work beyond the classroom. The nature of undergraduate research presentations demands that students apply theory to a product that can be understood or appreciated by a wider audience. The QEP will accelerate undergraduate research efforts at WCU by providing an explicit context for such efforts across campus. The Coulter Faculty Center will provide specific assistance to faculty in facilitating and designing student research activities.

Faculty will encourage students to participate in mentored research and public presentations in venues such as department symposia, public presentations and local, regional, and national research conferences. The Honors College will continue to encourage and support mentored research through operating funds (used to underwrite an on-campus Undergraduate Expo, WCU's participation in the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, the Undergraduate Projects Grant Program, and the magazine highlighting such endeavors, *Imagine*). In addition, The Honors College will continue to

encourage participation in undergraduate research by updating faculty and students on available research opportunities.

Undergraduate research or creative work has a natural connection to the objectives of the QEP as students will be encouraged to participate in mentored research and connect such activity to the evolving learning plan contained in the Education Briefcase.

MID/LATE EDUCATIONAL CAREER

Goal 3: *Students will evaluate their university experience (academic and student life) in relation to their future education, career, and/or life plans.*

Specific Learning Outcomes; students will:

1. Communicate the connections between the university experience to future education, career, and/or life plans.
2. Review and revise their Education Briefcase to create appropriate documents (résumés, cover letters, graduate school applications, etc.) in preparation for life after university.

Emphasis area in student's development under Goal 3: Late education career (junior, senior years).

Education Briefcase

The integration of students' academic and co-curricular experiences will culminate in the completion of the Education Briefcase. To this point, the Education Briefcase has served as the shared collaborative space through which students and faculty have interacted, tracked educational progress, and charted future plans. Now, the briefcase will allow students to create graduate school application materials, job resumes, and other relevant career materials. It will serve as a prompt and as a vehicle for documenting students' self-reflection on the nature of their university education. The briefcase will represent synthesis, the point at which students will fully recognize the

culmination of their educational career and how their activities inside and outside the classroom coalesce in a holistic way to further their life goals.

Advising

Advisors, in one-on-one discussions, will lead students in reflecting on the connections between their university experience and their ultimate career or graduate school plans. This process can begin in the junior year, or earlier as applicable. Advisors may include notes of these conversations, as well as questions or other prompts in the Education Briefcase.

Career Services

Counselors in Career Services will guide students in the formation of their career plans and translate those plans into specific outcomes (job or graduate school applications). Students will be able to see how their social and academic activities have prepared them for related job/graduate school opportunities and begin the process of “what’s next.” With guidance, students will be able to create the documents needed (resumes, cover letters, etc.) to get them to their next step. If this process is begun in the junior year, students will have an opportunity prior to graduation to reflect on and enhance areas that might need additional development.

Culminating Academic Experiences

Many WCU programs require some type of culminating academic experience. These include activities as varied as capstone courses, internships, public performances and presentations, research projects, and other activities depending on disciplinary differences. The Faculty Center will support academic programs with resources and

training as needed to enhance such capstone experiences in relation to the objectives of the QEP.

DRAFT

QEP Budget

During July, 2006, WCU included preliminary budget needs for the QEP in the university's expansion budget request. As demonstrated in the copy of that request below, the QEP is linked to the University of North Carolina system priorities. We will continue to fine-tune our budget in preparation for submission of the final Quality Enhancement Plan to SACS.

**Expansion Budget Request for
The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) – SACS
2007-2009
Justification**

- A. **Institutional Priority:** The Quality Enhancement Plan addresses four of the 12 priorities of the University of North Carolina:
1. **Student Success** (specifically to increase student retention) and **Outstanding Faculty** (specifically through the support and development of instructional and scholarly endeavors);
 2. **Research** (in the promotion of creative and scholarly activities);
 3. **Quality Academic Programs** (improving assessment of identified student learning outcomes) and **Support Services** (by improving activities related to advising, and enhancing co-curricular experiences such as career education);
 4. **Internationalization** (by increasing the number and quality of internship and cooperative education opportunities abroad).
- B. The Quality Enhancement Plan at Western Carolina University is designed to improve student learning in the area of synthesis. Undergraduates will be expected to develop skills that require them to make connections between their co-curricular and academic activities and to seek out opportunities to analyze their entire educational experience.
- C. The primary units at WCU that will be impacted by implementing the QEP are Career Services, The Coulter Faculty Center, academic departments, the Advising Center, and Orientation/Admissions. Other areas, including Service Learning, Residential Living, Information Technology Services, The Honors College, and the Assessment Office, will provide support in implementing the QEP.

The QEP will involve a redesign of the Career Services Office to become a Career Education Center that serves as the primary resource for major-related experiential learning opportunities. The plan will also call for a re-conceptualization of advising and the Advising Center with the re-introduction of a case management approach to guiding students through their undergraduate careers at WCU. The synthesis model that is adopted for the QEP will support the redesign as it brings together the careers, advising, one aspect of international programs (internships and coops abroad), mentored research, residential living, and service learning elements of student life. The Faculty Center will assist faculty in integrating the principles of synthesis into their teaching, facilitate their scholarly and creative endeavors, and specifically work with faculty who teach Liberal Studies. These initiatives require a significant budgetary commitment to effect the objectives of synthesis teaching and learning. Additionally, the Advising Center and the Career Services Office will need to supplement current space to adequately carry out the vision of the QEP. This has not been addressed as part of the expansion budget request.

While the development and implementation of a Quality Enhancement Plan is a requisite component of the SACS Review process, WCU's commitment to enhancing one significant aspect of student learning has received broad-based support from faculty, staff, students, and administrators; it fosters the community-building that is necessary to improve student performance as well as positively impact institutional climate.

- D. The attached expansion budget request for \$1.9 million will help to establish the necessary structures to make the QEP's implementation successful.

Expansion Budget Request - The QEP

Department: SACS - QEP

Date:

INSTRUCTIONS: Enter information in the yellow boxes. Insert additional rows as needed.

ALL OTHER TOTALS WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY CALCULATED

Section A: Budget Line Items - Personnel

Purpose/ Object <u>Code</u>	<u>Account Title</u>	<u>FTE</u>	<u>2007-2008</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>FTE</u>
			<u>Salary</u> <u>Amount</u>	<u>Amount</u>	
111010	EPA Regular Salaries				
	Professional Master's level position/counselor	0.0	35,000	0	0.0
	Professional Master's level position/counselor	0.0	35,000	0	0.0
	Increase .75 position to full time	0.0	9,818	0	0.0
	Bachelor's level - IT professional/Career Center	0.0	28,799	0	0.0
	Curriculum Design specialist		55,000		
	IT Accounts Manager - Education Career Briefcase		42,000		

	Eight College Advisors (\$44,000)		352,000				
	Upgrade Existing Advisors-College Advisor Status		55,000				
	Residential Living Retention Specialist Director		34,500				
	EPA Regular Salaries Subtotal:	0.0	647,117	0	0.0		
121010	SPA Regular Salaries						
	Full Time Support Staff person- Career Center	0.0	25,100	0	0.0		
	Half Time Support Staff person - Faculty Center	0.0	16,000	0	0.0		
	Coordinator - Teaching & Learning Events		45,000				
	SPA Regular Salaries Subtotal:	0.0	86,100	0	0.0		
115010	EPA Academic Salaries						
	Liberal Studies - Faculty Mentors	0.0	8,000	0	0.0		
	Stipends - Early adopters - Faculty	0.0	6,000	0	0.0		
	Provost Office - Faculty incentives-course devel.		10,000				
	Career Center - Faculty Stipends	0.0	8,000	0	0.0		
	Provost Office - Dept. incentives-capstone courses		4,500				
	EPA Academic Salaries Subtotal:	0.0	36,500	0	0.0		
135050	Student Wages						
	2 non-work Study Student Workers - Career Center	0.0	6,400	0	0.0		
	2 graduate students - Career Center	0.0	12,000	0	0.0		
	12 Residential Living Retention Counselors - GAs	0.0	72,000	0	0.0		
	Student Wages Subtotal:	0.0	90,400	0	0.0		
131010	Temporary Wages						
		0.0		0	0.0		
		0.0		0	0.0		
	Temporary Wages Subtotal:	0.0	0	0	0.0		

Section A: Budget Line Items - Pools

Purpose/ Object Code	Account Title	2007-2008		Total Amount
2100BP	Purchased Contractual Services			
	Career Education Center - External Consultants			6,000
	Faculty Center - External Consultants			2,500
	Purchased Contract'l Services Sub:			8,500
2200BP	Utilities			
	Utilities Subtotal:			0
2000BP	Purchased Services			
	Purchased Services Subtotal:			0
3000BP	Supplies			

	Career Center: office supplies			450			
	Advising Center: office supplies			650			
	Faculty Center: office supplies			350			
	Supplies Subtotal:			1,450			
4600BP	Art, Library, & Learning Resources						
	Creation of Service Learning Reflection Manual			800			
	Career Center/Advising: Interest Inventories			2,200			
	Career Center: subscriptions			290			
	Art, Library, & Learning Subtotal:			3,290			
5000BP	Other Expenses & Adjustments						
	Career Center Travel - job training and development			5,000			
	Career Center Travel - establish and supervise interns			10,000			
	Undergraduate Research - fac. & stud. Travel/res.			12,000			
	Advising Center: Upgrade to Advisortrac			1,100			
	Admissions - training for admissions counselors			950			
	Promotional materials on QEP/Synthesis			7,500			
	Campus Forums on Synthetical Learning			2,200			
	Faculty Center - training and visits to other campus			2,600			
	Career Center - new publications			1,800			
	Career Center - diagnostic instruments/software			2,000			
	Assessment - expand assessment measures/QEP			14,000			
	Advising Center - training & professional confs.			5,000			
	Residential Living Retention Specialists - training			500			
	Other Expenses & Adjust Subtotal:			64,650			
	Total (not including P,P,&E below):	0.0	860,117.0	77,890.0	0.0		

D

Section B: Equipment Requested

2007-2008

4000BP	<u>Account Title</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost per Unit</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>	<u>Quantity</u>		
	Property Plant and Equipment						
	Career Services: computers w/ docking stations	3.0	2,100.00	6300	0.0		
	career Services: work desks	3.0	650.00	1950	0.0		
	Career Services: desk chairs w/mats	3.0	400.00	1200	0.0		
	Career Services: reception area sofas	2.0	780.00	1560	0.0		
	Career Services: reception area chairs	5.0	400.00	2000	0.0		
	career Services: bookcases	3.0	550.00	1650	0.0		
	Career Services: filing cabinets	3.0	355.00	1065	0.0		
	Career Services: student/client workstations/library	4.0	650.00	2600	0.0		
	Career Services: scanner/printer	2.0	650.00	1300			
	Advising Center: computers and software	10.0	2,100.00	21000			
	Advising Center: workstations for college advisors	10.0	650.00	6500			
	Advising Center: chairs for advisors and clients	28.0	450.00	12600			
	Career Center: computer tables	2.0	350.00	700			
	Faculty Center: desk chairs	3.0	400.00	1200			
	Faculty Center: computers w/ docking stations	3.0	2,100.00	6300			
	Faculty Center: printer/scanner	1.0	650.00	650			
	Faculty Center: work desks	3.0	650.00	1950			
	IT Services: computer and software for accts. mgr.	1.0	3,200.00	3200	1.0		
	Property, Plant, & Equip. Subtotal:	89.0	17,085.00	73725	0.0		

DRAFT

Assessment

QEP Assessment Plan

Introduction

WCU recognizes that the long-term viability of its Quality Enhancement Plan depends on the quality of the assessment program and actions taken in response to the findings. As Gary Hanson has noted, the success of any higher education initiative is “not only about the educational outcomes we produce, but also the educational process we use to achieve those outcomes.”² WCU will assess institutional support (inputs), institutional effort (outputs), and the extent of student learning (outcomes). In addition, the university will disseminate, discuss, and act upon information generated through the QEP assessment process. Additionally, the university will periodically review the efficiency and effectiveness of the university’s decision-making processes.

WCU’s approach to assessment of the QEP is designed to make sure institutional mission and goals are integrated within the existing institutional practice.

- ▶ Assessment of the QEP will include and capitalize on existing university practices and activities.
- ▶ Assessment of the QEP will be cost effective not only in terms of university financial resources, but also in faculty/staff time and effort.
- ▶ Assessment of the QEP will utilize a variety of measures to form a more complete and robust picture of the impact of QEP initiatives on student learning.
- ▶ Assessment results will be disseminated throughout the campus and will be used in evaluating university actions and decision making.

Learning Goals/Outcomes of the QEP

1. Students will apply the synthesis concept in key decision-making. Specifically, will:

² Hanson, Gary. In Foreword to *Assessing Student Learning and Development* by Bresciani, M. J., Zelna, C. L., and Anderson, J. A. NASPA Publications, 2004.

- A. formulate a learning plan that integrates academic/student life and post-graduation goals.
 - B. demonstrate synthesis in key curricular and co-curricular decisions.
2. Students will reflect on their progress through the university experience, maintaining an integrated (synthesis) approach to learning. Specifically, students will:
 - A. connect the academic and student life components of their university experience.
 - B. refine their learning plan in light of those connections.
 3. Students will evaluate their university experience (academic and student life) in relation to their future education, career, and/or life plans. Specifically, students will:
 - A. communicate the connections between the university experience to future education, career, and/or life plans.
 - B. review and revise their Education Briefcase to create appropriate documents (resumes, cover letters, graduate school applications, etc.) in preparation for life after university.

Assessment Strategies, Protocols, and Procedures

[Insert Graphic]

The definitive measure of the Quality Enhancement Plan's effectiveness is determined by student learning—how it has been improved and how university processes enhance it. Assessment of the QEP, consequently, will focus primarily on learning outcomes assessment; however, process evaluation will also be key to determining the overall success of the QEP. To that end, the initial framework for assessment of the QEP is three-fold and will include:

1. An investigation of how QEP program initiatives affect students' ability to synthesize information across content and context.
2. An analysis of the QEP programs and procedures that promote synthesis to determine which are most effective.
3. A development of formative and continuous feedback and analytic mechanisms to shape further QEP program enhancements and institutional efforts.

During the QEP assessment process, the university will collect data on student affective characteristics, such as academic motivation, self-efficacy, general coping ability, and anxiety, cognition, and modes of problem solving to determine how these affect students' ability to synthesize.

Process Evaluation

Process evaluation for WCU's QEP will be modeled on the general evaluation work of Patton (2001), Fitz-Gibbon & Morris (1987), and Prosavac & Carey (1980).

Specifically, process evaluation will focus on three primary areas including:

1. staff, participant, and program context,
2. type and amount of services, and
3. fidelity to program design (program theory and model description, model deviation, implementation strategy, satisfaction, budget allocations, and cost effectiveness).

Process evaluation will function primarily as context for the interpretation of assessment results, capitalizing on those results which improve programs, and/or demonstrate how programs and the related assessment frameworks can be applied in other contexts (Patton, 2001; Fitz-Gibbon & Morris, 1987; Prosavac & Carey, 1980). Interviews and/or focus groups will be conducted each term with students, faculty, and staff to understand this context. The QEP Assessment Subcommittee will coordinate these focus groups. See Appendix A for specific questions.

In addition to the qualitative approach discussed above, we will collect key output data related to institutional support and effort, which will provide additional context for interpreting outcomes. These measure the level and extent of the university's

commitment to the stated goals and outcomes of the QEP. Table 1 summarizes the means by which institutional support and effort will be assessed.

Table 1. Measures of Institutional Support and Effort.

<u>Measure</u>	<u>Responsible Office/Individual</u>
Funds dedicated to QEP activities	Chancellor/Provost
Facilities/Services expanded to meet QEP objectives	Chancellor/Provost
Expanded Staffing to meet QEP objectives	Chancellor/Provost
Number of faculty/staff training opportunities related to incorporation of synthesis concept into programmatic and curricular activities.	Coulter Faculty Center
Number of students involved in 'case management' advising.	Advising Center
Number of College Advisors	Advising Center
Number of coops/internships available to students	Career Services
Rates of participation in coops/internships	Career Services
Number of faculty participating in QEP Learning Community	Coulter Faculty Center
Results of Faculty Survey on classroom activities related to QEP learning goals.	Assessment Office
Number of course syllabi with explicit outcomes related to QEP goals/incorporate synthesis.	Department Heads, Deans, Office of Assessment
Extent of incorporation of synthesis concept into university promotional materials	Public Relations/Office of Admissions
Number of student activities related to synthesis offered during freshman and transfer orientation	Orientation Coordinator
Number of student support and development activities related to synthesis	Offices of Student Support, Student Development, and Residential Life.

NOTE: The section below will need to be revised to more clearly (obviously) connect to the QEP learning outcomes.

Outcomes Assessment

Omnibus Framework

The first-year student entering WCU will generally operate relative to a set of expectations presented at orientation that specifies how he or she will work with advisors to begin the development of the Education Briefcase. The student will begin to structure the briefcase at orientation and will continue this process throughout the academic career at WCU. The advisor will also adhere to an expectation that anytime he or she meets with a student, the briefcase is reviewed relative to a set of guiding questions. It is expected that the student, where applicable given developmental level and current circumstances, reflect with the advisor on these guiding questions and supplement the briefcase with relevant information exhibiting key curricular/co-curricular decision points and/or information showcasing how the student achieved specified goal(s).

Although the advisor functions to ensure the student keeps on track and appropriately develops a working briefcase, there are also important guideposts across the institution that are part of the QEP framework and will help ensure students stay on track. The developmental trajectories of students will vary, but these guideposts are important and denote key “developmental” points in the program. These are critical to specify because they help to clarify general expectations and enable a consideration of program effects on a given population as they move through the experience (see the Implementation Section for more discussion on QEP framework).

Specifically, the key guideposts include:

- first year orientation prior to fully matriculating into the institution;
- first-year composition;
- program major consultation session with academic advisor (by the time they have reached 45 credits);
- career services consultation session (by the time they have reached 75 credits); and
- applying for graduation.

The guideposts will enable the evaluation team to select from a randomly stratified sample of briefcases and assess the products (i.e., the contents of the briefcase) relative to a predetermined rubric at key threshold points. The QEP Assessment Subcommittee will ensure reviewers of the briefcase are appropriately trained following the training protocols and procedures outlined in Wolcott & Legg (1998) and White (1994) to ensure meaningful results. Readers will be trained (BY WHOM?) at the beginning and at regular intervals throughout the project.

The QEP Assessment Subcommittee will review the outcomes of these rating sessions relative to socio-demographic differences in the sample population, interval level course grades in composition, score differentials on key subscales from measures that assess learning approach, self-efficacy, study effort, amount of time spent on in-class and out-of-class activities, and problem solving (see discussion of measures below). Additionally, the guideposts will enable the QEP-evaluation team to have key formative evaluation points to collect information to better target where breakdowns may be occurring and work with advisors, program directors, and faculty to ensure the QEP is successfully implemented.

Comparison Group Analysis (First-Year Assessment)

Like the majority of behavioral and educational research enterprises, we do not have the level of control that the design team believes it requires to make this a true-experimental design. Therefore, the evaluative framework will utilize a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent group design to assess the effects of select sections of Writing Composition on key QEP-related outcomes (pre-post) as ascertained from writing by students in response to prompts scored by multiple raters (Prosavac & Carey, 1980; Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Specifically, an entry and exit prompt formatted so test-retest competencies related to synthesis will be administered to all students participating in first-year composition (approximately 85%). Faculty teaching introductory composition in selected sections (25%) will be asked to use specific reflection, writing, and review activities related to the student's Educational Briefcase that promote the synthesis approach to learning.

The rating team will be made up of a mix of faculty members and members from the QEP implementation committee (OR ASSESSMENT SUB-COMMITTEE?). Prompts and briefcases will be blindly rated to ensure section and student is not identifiable and inter-rater reliability will be assessed (WHAT DOES THIS SENTENCE MEAN?). Composition faculty members will not be recruited to review the briefcases, given difficulty in maintaining a blind rating of this educational product. Similar to the omnibus framework, outcomes related to the prompts and educational briefcases for those included in this analysis will be reviewed in relationship to the following criteria: interval level course, score differentials on the prompt, and key survey measures that assess learning approach, self-efficacy, and problem solving.

Following the holistic training protocols and procedures outlined in Wolcott & Legg (1998) and White (1994), the assessment leaders will place a premium on training (and re-training) of scorers to ensure the research and evaluation design leads to meaningful results. Readers will be trained—or, more precisely, normed—at the beginning of each scoring project, and re-normed throughout the scoring at regular intervals.

Key Measures

Assessment of the QEP learning outcomes will occur in several phases. Initially, the pilot assessment will begin in summer/fall 2007 using a defined cohort of first-year students in First Year Composition courses as described above. Several assessment instruments will be administered on a recurring cycle. These include:

The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE): The BCSSE measures students' pre-college involvement in academic and co-curricular activities as well as their expectations for involvement in and the importance of educationally purposeful activities in college. The BCSSE will be administered in the summer prior to matriculation beginning in 2007 (see appendix).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE): The NSSE measures a range of student academic and co-curricular experiences and level of engagement in

college. The NSSE provides a body of extremely well-tested and reliable data that research has consistently shown to be empirically linked to student learning and development. The NSSE has been administered at WCU in 2001, 2004 and 2006. The survey will be administered again in 2007 and 2010. NSSE provides student-level data and this information will be utilized as a control on the outcomes analysis and to undertake comparisons between students who directly participate in the QEP- pilot and those who do not participate (see appendix).

The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE): The FSSE measures (See appendix) WE PROBABLY NEED THE DEFINITION HERE.

The Behavioral Indicators of Future Performance – BIFP (Kirnan, 2004) is a biographical inventory that is designed to identify factors related to initial college success. Based on the theory that “the best predictor of future performance is past performance”, this instrument provides information on past academic, co- and extra-curricular activities, financial maturity, support systems, expectations, commitment, and attitudes. *BIFP* will be administered to incoming freshmen whose answers will be compared to success (GPA) and retention over their college career. Similar to the NSSE, student-level data will be utilized as a control on the outcomes analysis and to undertake comparisons between students who directly participate in the QEP- pilot and those who do not participate (see appendix X).

Approaches and Study Skills Inventory - ASSIST – (Entwistle, 2004)

This instrument is based on two primary dimensions: the conceptions of learning and the approaches to learning dimensions. The conceptions of learning dimension is described by Marton & Saljo (1996) and extended by Hattie (1996). Essentially, the first four subscales attempt to ascertain whether or not a student has an instrumental approach to learning which indicates a conception of learning as oriented toward reproducing knowledge, while the remaining four subscales ascertain the degree the participant views learning as involving personal understanding and development. The approaches to studying inventory is derived from Marton & Saljo’s (1976, 1997) ideas on approaches to

learning, combined with Entwistle & Ramsden's (1983, see also Ramsden & Entwistle, 1979) descriptions on a strategic approach to studying (See **appendix ?** for more information).

Online Advisor Evaluation – (yet-to-be-developed) Students will have the opportunity to rate their evaluators on a variety of subscales related to satisfaction, approachability, empathy, and effectiveness.

Focus Groups will be convened with participants periodically to further understand participants' perceptions of overall experience with the express purpose of soliciting questions and an understanding of any unanticipated consequences of the QEP activities or assessment process.

WCU Alumni Survey: WCU will administer an alumni survey to graduates at 1 and 5 years out on a three year cycle. Items will be included that relate to key learning outcomes specified in the QEP.

Dissemination and Use of Assessment Results

Specific oversight of assessment of the QEP will be the responsibility of the QEP Assessment Subcommittee. This committee will consist of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the Director of Assessment, the Director of Institutional Research and Planning, select faculty members, and others as necessary. The QEP Assessment Subcommittee will be responsible for research design, data collection, data analysis, and reporting of results to the larger QEP Implementation Committee. The QEP Assessment Subcommittee will prepare an annual report of its activities and findings with specific presentations to the Executive Council, Council of Deans, Faculty Senate, Strategic Planning Committee, Student Affairs' Directors Council [Ask Bob], and other university groups as deemed necessary. The Committee will also make recommendations to the QEP Implementation Committee identifying additional resources and measures needed to implement and assess the effectiveness of the QEP.

Appendix A:
Focus Group Questions

Comment: These questions seem to be addressed to us the QEP assessment people. I would completely re do them if we want to have a focus group with students.

1. What constitutes an active student and/or faculty participant in the QEP and what does this individual actually do in the program? What are their primary activities (in detail)? What do they experience?
2. What are the program's key characteristics as perceived by various stakeholders--for example, students, administrators, advisors, the QEP assessment and implementation team, faculty (term, full-time, part-time) actively participating and directly connected to the QEP initiative? How similar or different are those perceptions? What's the basis?
3. What was the reason the QEP got structured the way it did? What is the consensus about next steps for this Structure? Services?
4. How do the parts of the QEP structurally/programmatically fit together? Are there perceived gaps or disconnects?
5. After the initial pilot, what has changed from the original design and intentions of the QEP and related program elements and why? On what basis are adaptations from the original design being made? Who needs to "approve" such changes?
6. What is the participation rate of faculty in QEP related initiatives?
7. What parts of the curriculum evidence direct influence from the QEP initiative and why?
8. How is evaluation built into the delivery of our services? What are the primary capture points? Additionally, what are possible capture points moving forward?
9. What's working as expected? What's not working as expected? What challenges and barriers have emerged? How have we responded to these barriers?
10. How well are students, administrators, advisors, faculty (term, full-time, part-time) teaching in the program functioning together? What are their perceptions about what's working and not working? Do they know what outcomes they're aiming for? Do they "buy into" the program's goals and intended outcomes?

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