

# Part I. Foundational Elements



## PREAMBLE

*"...to be a live school and to impart to [our] students a burning zeal to do and be something."*

Henry Hardin Cherry

Since its inception in 1906, Western Kentucky University has been defined by a desire to positively and personally impact the lives of its students. Western faculty and staff place the highest premium on providing opportunities for students to succeed, both in their coursework and beyond. Individual faculty, units and divisions have each been highly successful at providing opportunities for growth within their respective arenas. Our undergraduates routinely gain notoriety as research scholars, creative artists, athletes and entrepreneurs. Among our alumni, Western can point to educators, physicians, and public servants of the highest reputation.

This student-driven focus is evident in the university's mission statement and strategic planning process. Western's mission statement identifies our principal objective: "preparing students to be productive citizens of a global society..." Central to this mission are a set of core values, which include "encouragement of meaningful and active partnerships among students, faculty, staff and constituents to strengthen the learning environment" and "commitment to providing a collegiate experience that prepares students to be informed, engaged, and dedicated citizens." The strategic plan commits the university to increasing student learning through activities which include setting specific targets for "curricular and [co-] curricular involvement that increase students' global understanding" and "student engagement in activities that enhance education (e.g., internships, leadership experiences, community service, undergraduate research, cultural events)." There can be no doubt that the Western model places a high premium on experiential opportunities for learning and self-exploration.

While much has been done, it is now time to build on our successes and take the next step in the process. We must establish a more exact **institutional awareness** of what we hope to achieve with respect to student learning, and how our activities are complementary to that objective. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) represents the logical thematic framework for continued growth of the institution and the university community at large. Besides addressing our goal of enhancing student learning in a systematic manner, adopting a common perspective will help foster a strengthened university culture and increased appreciation for the intrinsic value of higher education. But what should that common theme be ?

Western long ago adopted Henry Hardin Cherry's aphorism that "*The Spirit Makes the Master.*" Nevertheless, it remains unclear to many exactly what defines the *Spirit* of which Cherry spoke. Cherry was correct in seeing that achieving mastery of one's career and life was more than just acquiring vocational training or a set of tangible accomplishments; he knew that true success involved a significant intangible component. It is time for Western to identify a clear sense of the *Spirit* we hope to cultivate in our students and in ourselves, and to place this vision in a modern, practical context.

To that end, we cast Cherry's *Spirit* in terms of engagement. If we can cultivate a pattern of meaningful engagement in our students, we will imbue them with the *Spirit* that will enable them to become true masters of themselves, their professions and of their place in society. This in turn will propel a continuing trend of enhanced quality among our graduates and advancement of the university's reputation and prominence as an institution focused on student learning and subsequent achievement.

The goal of this plan is to stimulate a **systems change** at Western. We do not set out to simply establish new policy or impose additional burdens on faculty and staff; rather, we hope to recognize and promote those things we already do well, and to build upon those strengths to help us improve further. By directing a process of self-reflection organized around a common theme, we hope to enable faculty and staff to work better, not harder and, at the same time, harness the energy, resources and opportunities available throughout the university community to catalyze the continuous enhancement of educational quality and to positively impact student learning. To that end, we define our mission around the tripartite theme of *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society*.

### ***What do we mean by engagement ?***

**Engagement** is the **process** by which we will achieve our objective of enhancing student learning at Western. By systematically engaging students in meaningful ways, we can elevate the value of a Western education, as well as our ability to deliver that education in ways that are relevant to the goals and expectations of each student. We see engagement as a means by which students can cultivate in themselves a perspective that will serve them well throughout their lives. To tap into this potential for self-motivated exploration, we must identify the root process, independent of specific examples.

To our way of thinking, **engagement stems from knowledge, sustained commitment, and ultimately passion for the goal.** This passion for learning, aesthetics or service on behalf of a cause helps to shape individuals' worldview and promote their professional and personal development. Through what manner of engagement can this growth be best manifest in students ?.

For non-traditional or first-generation college students, enrolling in university coursework may represent a significant degree of engaged learning beyond what they have experienced previously. Other students might define the opportunity to participate in meaningful independent research or creative activity within their disciplines as the type of learning engagement that sets them apart from their peers. Still others may demonstrate their passion and commitment to excellence through civic or community service activities. The nature of engagement will thus vary among individuals, as well as during the lifetime of an individual; however, the feature common to these myriad of forms is that meaningful engagement is transformative, opening both minds and doors to success. We have adopted a Taxonomy of Engagement to organize the many ways engagement can be brought to bear on student learning. This taxonomy, along with a lexicon of terms relating to engaged learning, is provided in [Appendix 1](#).

It is incumbent upon the university to promote the intellectual growth, personal and professional success of students, faculty and staff, and to create a climate that fosters the opportunities and rewards for growth. In this way, the university serves as an incubator for a pool of thoughtful minds.

### ***How do we define and recognize meaningful engagement ?***

In defining meaningful engagement, we can not simply derive a list of activities and opportunities available to students. Nor should we restrict our view of engagement as being the purview of academic training, student life programming, or the world beyond the gates of campus. Engagement involves all of these and more. The challenge is then to organize these disparate aspects of engagement around a shared vision of that which is embodied in the *Western Experience*.

To determine what constitutes engagement in the sense intended, we must ask three essential questions:

- a. Does the activity allow students to step outside the traditional boundaries of their experience and/or training ?
- b. Does the activity encourage personal exploration, enhance students' professional skills and understanding, or broaden their worldview ?
- c. Does the activity have the **potential to be transformative** in the lives of students ?

If we can answer yes to each of these questions, then the activity in question can be seen as complementary to our shared vision, and to the overarching objective of *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society*.

### ***What do we mean by success ?***

Student **success** is the **outcome** we will use to judge our effectiveness. A truly engaged student population will create a positive, synergistic force for continued learning, reflection and personal awareness. If students can place their academic training and co-curricular activities within the broader context of the world of which they are a part, this will enhance their ability to succeed in that environment.

It is essential to realize that, **while some aspects of enhanced student success may be tangible and quantifiable, others are not.** Indicators of academic success, including retention and persistence rates, standardized test scores, graduation, certification and placement success rates are potentially valid measures of the impact of increased efforts at engagement. Complementary to these performance-based approaches, however, are qualitative assessments of students' perceptions of their Western experience and the impact it may have had on their personal lives; such impressions might be derived through the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) and Western Kentucky University Student Engagement Survey (WKUSES), and could indicate success even students that may not persist to graduation. Finally, there may be aspects of success that do not manifest themselves until years after students complete their coursework.

Thus, in defining success, we must consider both the professional and personal advantages derived by students during their Western experience as well as their subsequent capacity to contribute to society in a meaningful way throughout their lives. We can view students as being successful if they have developed the knowledge, skills, behaviors and values that allow them to become productive citizens in a democratic society. It is the responsibility of the university to provide and help students take advantage of opportunities that advance their personal and professional aspirations, while also explicitly highlighting the capacity, even responsibility, of educated citizens to contribute to their communities and society.

### ***What do we mean by a global society ?***

The **global** nature of modern society and of the challenges we face daily form the requisite **context** in which our plan resides. Being a productive citizen requires each of us to confront and appreciate diverse opinions and complex questions and, in turn, necessitates an understanding of the genesis of this complexity.

As with engagement and success, there is not a single definition of global to which we can point or orient our actions. Diversity obviously has a spatial component; to that end, exposing students to different cultures through international exchange and by developing a diverse university community represents a critical element of the global context we must recognize and establish. However, we also recognize that a diversity of opinions can (and, arguably, should) exist within a single community, reflecting such things as generational differences, socioeconomic factors, ethnicity, and differing political viewpoints. Likewise, as scholars we know that the most vexing personal, professional and societal problems we encounter are so challenging because they require integrated solutions that synthesize information from various disciplines and perspectives. The conceptual thread running through these examples is that **a global society is integrative.**

It is the job of the university to build this awareness in students, to cultivate an appreciation for this diversity in all its forms, as well as develop their capacity to be competitive in a global society. We must create a climate for living and learning that embraces alternative viewpoints, rewards integrative thinking, recognizes those factors which both define and unite us, and promotes free thought. In this way, the university serves as a model for society at large.

## REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES RELATED TO ENGAGEMENT

It is apparent from an initial investigation of sources that work on the subject of student engagement is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although the “best practices” literature extends in volume backward at least to the 1980s, the concept of student engagement as it is now being applied—largely toward the notion of preparing more societally-invested, responsible citizens—has come about since 2000. The completion of the first National Survey of Student Engagement in 2001 provided the first incentive for focused examination of the subject, and in the past three years the rate of considered investigation has greatly accelerated. A bibliography of sources relating to best practices in student engagement is provided in [Appendix 2](#).

Although there is now a fair amount of material on the subject of student engagement available on the free Web (see the list of some relevant items given below), recency of the movement is reflected in the fact that the preponderance of related material at this point resides in the serial literature. There appears to be little of import in book form as yet; it is highly likely, however, that within a year or two monographic treatments will begin to appear in greater number as research programs begin to produce larger-scale results. One exception to the preceding is that quite a few theses and dissertations have been appearing on the subject since at least the mid 1990s; some of these are listed in [Appendix 2](#).

Examination of the four bibliographies presented in [Appendix 2](#) (on books, theses and dissertations, magazine and journal articles, and free Web sources, respectively) suggests a clear division of approach (or perhaps a “two-pronged attack”) on the subject of student engagement and how to achieve it. The majority of the literature deals with best practice approaches to improving the quality of in-class instruction as a vehicle for getting students more engaged in their education. However, there is also considerable interest being taken in looking at the problem from a more global perspective.

The “best practices” advocates feel that students will become more engaged in their education—and thus eventually become more enthusiastic and “better” citizens—with the direct application of more insightful instruction methods in the classroom. Most of the best practices literature considers various means of introducing and applying particular teaching techniques, on the premise that these will lead to a more engaged form of learning. However, the newness of the connection between instructional best practices and engagement in the larger scale sense leaves this as an assumption only at this point. Neither does there seem to be much if any literature on how to go about implementing best practice strategies on a mass scale; i.e., in a fashion directly relatable to assessment and planning, and to the interests of teaching faculty. It is important that this should begin to take place, as the subject bears not only on engagement *per se*, but also on related matters such as retention.

Other investigators have been using what might be termed an “ecological” approach to the analysis of the causes of disengagement. This literature examines a variety of possible non-classroom-centered influences, but seems to key especially on two kinds: demographic factors (race, wealth, etc.) and campus site factors (availability and strength of student support and housing and community programs, campus attractiveness and accessibility, quality of campus information dissemination operations, etc.). Ecological influences on the student’s sense of engagement have so far been relatively neglected in favor of best practices approaches to the question. This asymmetry overlooks the fact that the classroom is by no means the only element of the college experience that is significant to students, nor the only possible way of exposing students to the concepts and activities that promote success in citizenship and in life in general.

One cautionary note: The term “student engagement” is frequently applied in the literature to indicate any kind of in-class involvement resulting from the application of a particular technique (i.e., a “best practice”), and it is nearly impossible at present to separate this connotation from the broader one looking toward the training and eventual emergence of socially responsible and productive individuals.

## CHRONOLOGY OF WESTERN'S QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Development of a QEP began in 2002 with the charge to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Leadership Team to identify a list of potential themes. The first step was to review the university's mission, strategic planning initiatives over the past several years, results from administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and trends in enrollment, retention, and graduation rates.

Since 1998, Western has operated under a comprehensive strategic plan oriented towards building the university's reputation as a comprehensive institution of national prominence. *Challenging the Spirit* comprises five strategic goals.

- Goal 1. Increase student learning:** Promote learning that fully develops individual potential and produces graduates who can successfully live, work, and contribute to society in a global context.
- Goal 2. Develop the student body:** Attract, retain, and graduate an increasingly diverse, academically-talented, and achievement-oriented student population.
- Goal 3. Assure High Quality Faculty and Staff:** Attract, retain, and support high-quality faculty and staff.
- Goal 4. Enhance Responsiveness to Constituents:** Respond to educational, social, cultural, and economic development needs through increased outreach, applied scholarship, service, and innovative opportunities for lifelong learning.
- Goal 5. Improve Institutional Effectiveness:** Commit to continuous improvement of institutional effectiveness and efficiency in all programs and services.

As one means of assessing our efforts to fulfill our mission and realize strategic goals, we have collected and utilized data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) on a periodical basis. Results from surveys of Western students in 2001 and 2003 revealed that, while seniors rated Western higher than predicted on "Enriching Educational Experience," they rated the university lower than predicted on "Active and Collaborative Learning," "Student Interactions with Faculty Members," "Level of Academic Challenge," and "Supportive Campus Environment." Moreover, in both years, fewer than one-fourth of seniors reported that their college experience had contributed to their voting behavior in local, state, and national elections, and just over a third reported that their college experience had had an impact on knowledge, skills, and personal development in contributing to the welfare of their community.

These results added to concerns that rapid enrollment growth (an increase of 4000 students in a five-year period) had weakened the institution's ability to provide the support for student engagement activities believed to be necessary to develop productive citizens of a global society. Because of unfavorable economic conditions, this growth came largely without concomitant increases in state appropriations, placing additional burdens on existing faculty, staff and institutional capacity. Moreover, institutional leaders were determined to increase retention and six-year graduation rates, and these objectives were emphasized as well by the statewide coordinating body, the Council on Postsecondary Education.

A few institutional initiatives related to these concerns had already been planned or were in the process of being implemented, so the requirement to develop a QEP as part of SACS reaccreditation efforts was timely. Some examples of student learning and service activities either begun or planned at the time the QEP theme was under development are the Applied Research and Technology Program, the American Humanics Project, the Global Entrepreneurship Program, the Leadership Studies Program, the Alive Center (A Local Information and Volunteer Exchange), and the American Democracy Project. Thus, the decision was made to build on these and other efforts with a QEP targeting engagement, student achievement, civic responsibility, leadership, and/or cultural and international awareness.

Three potential QEP themes were considered: (a) Increasing student engagement, (b) Promoting student success, and (c) Preparing students to be productive citizens in a global society. Over a period of several months the SACS Leadership Team sought input from the faculty, academic departments, the Student Government Association, the Council of Academic Deans, the University Senate, department heads in the Division of Student Affairs and Campus Services, and the Administrative Council. Based on

comments received in the various forums, the Leadership Team prepared a summary of each potential theme's strengths and weaknesses, ultimately recommending to the Provost a theme that combined elements of all three: *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society*. After reviewing the summary and recommendation, the Provost in turn recommended this theme to the President, who made the final decision to approve the theme.

Once the theme was approved, the Provost appointed a QEP Steering Committee to further develop the plan itself. This 37-member committee included faculty, staff and students representing all major constituencies of the university community (see [Appendix 3](#)). Beginning in Fall 2003, the Steering Committee held meetings, participated in retreats, and divided into subcommittees to advance its work.

The QEP Steering Committee began by building consensus among the committee members regarding definitions of "engagement", "success" and "global society." Then, for the purpose of developing and implementing the plan, it adopted two guiding operational perspectives: (a) No New Reports; and (b) No More With Less. The point was to signal our goal of maximizing positive effects on students while minimizing the negative impacts on faculty, staff and administration. The committee challenge was to develop an ambitious plan and simultaneously market it in a way that built institutional ownership. The broadly constituted committee demonstrated to the community that this was an institutional effort.

Like any new or additional endeavor, the QEP Steering Committee recognized that it faced predictable institutional inertia. Consequently, the committee chose to find ways to recognize and celebrate the good things that we were already doing, and worked to enhance, promote, expand and be more intentional about advancing these agendas.

The committee also modeled the behavior it wanted to encourage throughout the university community. For example, committee members gathered data regarding current examples of student engagement on campus in non-traditional ways. Rather than asking, faculty, departments, units, colleges to report on their current activities, each of the committee members interviewed their respective constituencies. We did this for several reasons: (a) to establish a baseline of data; (b) to raise the institutional awareness regarding engagement; and (c) to create a situation where each unit on campus was intentionally introspective regarding their ongoing activities. It is noteworthy that the QEP Steering Committee members assumed the majority of the work collecting data, thereby modeling our philosophy regarding "no new reports."

The committee recognized that one of the major challenges in developing a QEP is demonstrating the connection of the theme to student learning. The concept that students, who are actively engaged in their education, learn more and are more successful than those less-engaged students is well supported in the literature. Consequently, the Steering Committee recognized the opportunity to document engagement activities as one measure of learning; however, we chose to go beyond this process-based assessment model in two major ways. First, as we expect students who are engaged in their educational experience to gain knowledge, develop skills, change their behavior, and deepen their values, the committee resolved to develop performance indicators associated with knowledge, skills, behavior and values as key elements of our QEP assessment. Second, the committee recognized the opportunity to establish and fund an internal research group to help find better ways to refine measurements of learning, while also providing an outlet for interested faculty and staff experts to participate in the scholarship of engagement while contributing to the validity and strength of our assessment paradigm.

In February, 2004, Dr. Margaret Sullivan was brought in as an external consultant to, in part, review the status of the QEP during its initial development phase. In June 2004, ten persons (administrators, faculty, staff, and one student) traveled to Snowbird, Utah, to attend the American Association of Colleges and Universities' Greater Expectations Institute, "Campus Leadership for Student Engagement, Inclusion, and Achievement," with the objective of further refining the goals and activities to be included in the QEP. At this workshop, the basic framework of the QEP was finalized, and the committee began work on strategies for introducing the QEP to the university community during the Fall 2004 semester.

A two-page summary of the draft QEP was presented to faculty and staff at the Opening Convocation of the Fall 2004 semester. During that same week, members of the Steering Committee met with Department Heads and Directors, as well as faculty from the individual colleges to discuss the QEP and

its relevance to particular units, and sponsored a four-hour workshop for faculty and staff representatives from most units on campus. The purpose of these efforts was to assist individuals and units across campus in becoming educated about the goals and purpose of the QEP, and to help initiate conversations within individual units about the QEP. Over the subsequent three months, the Steering Committee sought out feedback, suggestions and proposals from units across campus to advance the plan's growth into a mature document.

In November 2004, the Steering Committee presented a revised QEP draft to the university SACS Leadership Team. Throughout the next three months, these groups worked to hone presentation of the plan, and specifically begin to articulate discrete, quantifiable, and meaningful student learning indicators related to our student learning goals and desired learning outcomes.

Both the SACS Leadership Team and the QEP Steering Committee have worked deliberately over the past two years to build broad consensus regarding the potential of the QEP to significantly improve students learning. The chosen theme is harmonious with our institutional character and history, and has consequently been received with optimism by the university community.

## A CONTEXT FOR ADVANCING STUDENT LEARNING THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

### *The Western Philosophy*

Western's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) theme, *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society*, was developed as a means of extending, focusing, and realizing aspects of the university's mission stated in its strategic plan, *Challenging the Spirit*.

***Western Kentucky University prepares students to be productive citizens of a global society and provides service and lifelong learning opportunities for its constituents.***

The university's mission statement reflects our aspiration to prepare our students, who are largely from our immediate geographical region, for challenges they may face in the broader world. The university's mission also includes a commitment to being an active partner in the community and the world of which we are a part. The university's strategic plan, *Challenging the Spirit*, includes a statement of core values that further emphasizes the institutional focus on intentional efforts to develop students' capacity "to be informed, engaged, and dedicated citizens."

We base our approach to meeting this challenge on the following premise: **the more students are actively engaged in and by a broad educational experience, the richer their learning will be and the greater their potential to contribute to society in positive ways.** Our foundation for student learning is built on three core educational values:

- 1. Student-Centered Education:** All members of the university community – faculty, administrators, support staff, and board members – are committed to creating an institution of quality centered on the growth and development of students.
- 2. Engaged Learning:** Because education takes place everywhere and all the time, it is important both to create an exciting learning environment on campus and to extend opportunities for significant learning experiences into the community and the wider world. Active participation in learning, engaged citizenship, service-driven leadership, and committed stewardship are fundamental components of the outstanding educational experience we strive to provide.
- 3. Disciplinary Expertise within an Interdisciplinary Learning Context:** Western expects students to apply intellectual rigor to the exploration of a range of disciplines and to build a broad foundation of knowledge and experience.

As a comprehensive institution, we feel it is incumbent upon us to develop students' knowledge, skills and abilities within their primary fields of study, while also providing them with a broad, liberal background of knowledge and experience. In a related way, we strive to empower students with opportunities to undertake personal exploration and growth as part of their university education, and to develop their sense of social responsibility and worldview. **In the broadest sense, we seek to produce graduates who think critically, serve generously, and lead responsibly.**

### ***A Shared Perspective***

That higher education should cultivate students' professional skills as well as their intellectual capacity and social maturity is not a revolutionary idea, but rather a foundation of the university as a human construct over the past thousand years (Buarque 2004, Laurens 2004). In addition to the validation of history, there exist ample contemporary research data to support the assertion that engaged learning in a liberal educational context produces educated citizens (see [Appendix 4](#)). While the tenets and learning outcomes that result are long-established, the world in which this learning is set is very different from past generations (Laurens 2004), and the university must respond to this highly dynamic and global context (Buarque 2004). A recent report by the Greater Expectations Institute (GEI; 2002; Leskes 2004) identified "a contemporary liberal education reinvigorated by becoming more practical and more engaged" as the most potent approach to educating student-citizens in the modern world.

Engagement has long been recognized as a vital part of effective education. At the most basic level — participation vs. passivity — it fits Bruner and others' constructivist theory of learning: learners use their experiences to create a type of understanding uniquely relevant to them. If, as many studies show, this sort of knowledge is especially vivid and likely to be retained, emphasizing appropriate forms of student engagement will lead to improved learning.

Among the engagement techniques that have proved most effective are involving students in designing and conducting experiments; having students give presentations on others' ideas, with an emphasis on conceptual understanding; having students synthesize a variety of disparate views; and using "authentic" activities: that is, activities similar to the tasks students will be expected to perform in the "real" world. Other possibilities for engaged learning supported by the literature include: travel, especially that associated with academic training; service activities appropriate to a particular discipline; multi-cultural exposure and experiences, and work-study programs and internships. Each of these strategies encourages students to become involved with a community other than their own and to make sense of the experience.

Motivation is another factor clearly related to educational achievement, and studies show intrinsic motivation (which arises within the self) is more effective than extrinsic motivation (for example, praise or money), especially among self-confident students. In this context, self-confidence comes about as students are exposed to a variety of environments and demands and find themselves equal to these challenges. An ideal learning situation, then, is a self-confident student working in response to intrinsic motivation. Active learning that requires students to complete authentic tasks routinely brings these factors together. Students perform meaningful tasks, which if chosen wisely are intrinsically motivating, and gain self-confidence in the process. These experiences increase the power of intrinsic motivation in a self-reinforcing feedback loop. In this way, engagement empowers students as active participants in their own learning.

This perspective is also consistent with Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seminal statement of the principles of good practice in undergraduate education:

*encourage contact between students and faculty,  
develop reciprocity and cooperation among students,  
encourage active learning,  
give prompt feedback,  
emphasize time on task,  
communicate high expectations, and  
respect diverse talents and ways of learning.*

It is clear that Western's approach to teaching and learning, and to development of our QEP, reflects a perspective consistent with both history and the educational research literature. This gives us great confidence that our approach to increasing student learning through engagement is both sound and viable.

### **Emergent Potential**

In addition to advancing student learning goals *sensu strictu*, the GEI (2002) report also proposes that a university paradigm based on engagement will assist students' growth as intentional learners, those "integrative thinkers who can transfer their learning from one context to another and apply it to newly encountered or unscripted problems and environments." Part of this growth is helping students learn to recognize the limits of their understanding and what they need to move forward (Bransford et al. 1999). Such higher-order skills are cultivated by approaches to learning that focus on building contextual awareness (sense-making), self-reflection, and self-assessment (Bransford et al. 1999). Thus, adopting a participatory, integrative and modern climate for learning at Western should lead to the emergent learning outcome of measurable increases in students' development as intentional learners and global citizens.

Finally, the GEI (2002) report suggests that adopting innovative approaches to educating students can be transformational for the university as a whole. If we create an environment where engaged learning is accepted as the norm rather than the exception, we will have truly created an incubator for intentional learners: those who are *empowered* by a mastery of skills, *informed* by knowledge from diverse sources, and *responsible* for their own values (GEI 2002). At the same time, we will have advanced our secondary goal of making meaningful contributions to the growth and success of the community of which we are an integral part.

### ***An Approach to Promoting Engaged Learning***

How best do we create this climate for learning? We believe that by looking outwards and systematically incorporating relevant issues of the broader community and the world into students' educational experience, we will create a dynamic, integrative learning environment that will advance our goal of producing globally-competitive and socially-responsible graduates.

**Our QEP will implement strategies to engage students with communities other than their own as part of their *Western Experience*.** We define the phrase "communities other than their own" broadly, to encompass exposure of students to settings or groups that are outside the bounds of their previous experience. **We seek to link community and classroom, living and learning, thought and action, preparedness and passion.** There are three key student learning benefits that will arise:

1. By engaging in applied research or scholarly pursuits, service learning and leadership activities, students will develop their capacity to apply knowledge and training to address relevant concerns in community or society.
2. By broadening their exposure to diversity in all its forms, students will develop greater respect for diversity of peoples, ideas and cultures.
3. By identifying and integrating contemporary world issues as part of their learning, students will develop awareness of their opportunities as responsible citizens living and working in a global society.

The student learning initiatives we will undertake represent the thrust of our effort to enhance student learning through engagement at Western; however, they cannot stand alone. Success in advancing student learning outcomes requires that we simultaneously address our institutional and human capacity to promote engaged learning. As such, our QEP also identifies critical infrastructural and faculty/staff development targets that we believe undergird the student learning goals we set forth. We believe it is essential that our engagement theme be woven into the administrative fabric of the university, the outlook and professional approach of our faculty and staff. That is, we must become a fully engaged university community in order to effectively engage our students.

## ELEMENTS OF AN ENGAGED UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

The philosophies and common principles identified above are necessary prerequisites to full development of Cherry's *Spirit*, and to the success of our goal of *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society*. However, transduction of abstract ideals into a unique university culture requires a number of tangible factors. To wit, we can define the necessary elements of an engaged university community:

<b>Administrative Leadership</b>	Willingness to take on an ambitious transformation Tangible support and reward for initiatives Appreciation of the positive correlation between value and risk
<b>Academic Creativity</b>	A dynamic curriculum that encourages exploration and action Richness of basic research and creative expression The recognition that universities cultivate minds, not just skills
<b>Infrastructure that Facilitates Change</b>	Policies and procedures that promote rather than impede growth Willingness to adopt new approaches and campus initiatives Commitment to reflect on, streamline and integrate processes
<b>A Dynamic Campus Environment</b>	Student services that foster exposure to new ideas/experiences Opportunities for meaningful involvement and contribution A direct link between student ideas and campus policies
<b>A Sense of Social Obligation</b>	Strong focus on applied research, service and problem-solving Recognition of the university's place in the community A sense that "It's up to me"
<b>Alumni and Community Support</b>	Recognition by outside groups that universities grow and change Confidence in and tangible support for the university's abilities Willingness to invest in Western as a community partner

A key aspect of each of these factors is the element of **risk**. An aggressive strategic plan, the search for knowledge and insight, the willingness to address difficult problems, and the desire to impact others – all carry the potential to be unsuccessful. Yet, **true value lies in those activities that promote positive change, and all significant change carries an inherent risk of failure.**

It is our responsibility as an institution of higher learning to take on such challenges, promote divergent thinking and pioneer novel approaches; this is the process through which growth and transformation occur, both in our students and in our community. As we reflect on and develop ways to implement the recommendations below, we must first determine whether the initiative under consideration constitutes engagement in the sense intended by the QEP. Secondly, we should ask whether the activity carries any professional or productivity risk to the individual or department undertaking it. Activities that have the potential to significantly impact student learning and at the same time represent an opportunity for the individuals or units to extend themselves beyond the status quo should be viewed as particularly desirable.

At the same time, **we must establish a university culture and operational system that explicitly rewards individuals and units for acting in ways that embrace positive change** (without being reckless) as part of their attempt to enhance individual development, unit quality and performance. We must establish the mindset among students, faculty, staff, departments and units that willingness to become engaged and accept some risk is expected and, conversely, that avoiding risk is disadvantageous. Key to building this campus perspective is reinforcing this mindset with real incentives. In this way the university will demonstrate the necessary seriousness of purpose to validate the QEP and its goals.

**It is crucial to recognize that engaging students (in fact, in educating students in general) reaches beyond academics to encompass student life and the institutional support systems that, when implemented well, allow learning to occur.** Every individual, unit and constituency associated with the university community contributes directly to student learning through their actions. As we move forward, it will be essential that we adopt forward-looking and proactive approaches to budgeting, accounting, purchasing, hiring and other processes that are critically important to the successful implementation of new initiatives. We must establish an infrastructure that is creative in design, dynamic in nature, efficient in organization, and seamless in operation. It is equally important that we establish systems of review and reward that promote positive change and contribute to a holistic view of our actions as individuals and units.

**We must also impress upon students the need for them to take primary charge of their own education.** Opportunities for engagement are not something to be thrust on students; rather, we must reach a point where they are readily sought out by them. In addition, it is imperative that students develop a sense of ownership in their university and the communities of which they are a member. We feel this can best be achieved by creating a common perspective and direction for the university, and setting high and clear expectations that students will be active participants in the process.

If we reach a point where (a) there exist a diverse range of outlets for meaningful engagement on the part of students, (b) these opportunities are seamlessly aligned with curricular objectives and with university strategic priorities, and (c) students appreciate the value of and actively seek out opportunities to become engaged with their education and the world, we will then be in a position to legitimately claim that Western Kentucky University is ***Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society***.

## **INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES**

Our foremost priority is to actively engage students in their own learning, applying that learning to community and world issues. Such engagement is intentional, reflective, linked to learning outcomes, and integrated within program quality criteria. We also recognize that a major challenge is to keep the theme of the QEP as focused as possible. For the purposes of SACS reaccreditation and accountability under the QEP, we intend to enhance student learning by supporting significant action initiatives related to the following targeted student learning goal and its associated broad elements:

**Increase student learning by engaging students with communities other than their own in purposeful learning activities that explicitly address their capacity and responsibility to contribute to community and society.**

- A. Cultivate a participatory learning environment in our courses and curricula, especially as it advances development of integrative thought processes and students' appreciation for a diversity of viewpoints.
- B. Increase opportunities for student/faculty collaborative scholarly activity and service learning in the disciplines.
- C. Design curricular and co-curricular experiences to meet the specific needs of and promote a pattern of engagement in students from their first semester onward.
- D. Integrate curricular and co-curricular experiences into the living and learning environment while broadening the spectrum of cultural and civic opportunities available on and beyond campus.

We recognize the need to provide an institutional infrastructure that will fully facilitate achievement of our student learning goal. As such, we will undertake a range of initiatives to advance the following two ancillary goals and their associated elements:

**Institutionalize and support the mission of *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society*.**

- A. Dedicate sufficient institutional resources to maximize our potential for success.
- B. Promote and reward individuals, units and activities that engage students with their discipline, their community and the world.
- C. Foster an environment that promotes innovations in pedagogy, facilitates collaboration, expands the reach of Western students beyond their physical locale, and provides opportunities for engagement to those otherwise excluded by place or time.
- D. Provide mechanisms for information dissemination that support the curriculum and scholarly needs of the faculty and students and ensure that students are aware of these resources.
- E. Foster a campus infrastructure that removes barriers to implementing engagement objectives.

**Build capacity within faculty and staff to facilitate student engagement and experiential learning.**

- A. Develop an academic advising process that ensures advisors have tools to effectively assist and prepare students to assume increasing responsibility for their academic programs, as well as their professional and personal development.
- B. Provide training for faculty and staff in methodologies for engaging students in their courses and beyond.

The plan is built on a discrete timeline with anticipated internal benchmarks. Progress towards meeting specific student learning outcomes will continually be assessed using discrete, quantifiable and qualitative indicators. Yet we must also judge our overall success at creating the institutional transformation we desire. This requires a vision for Western's future that builds on its traditions and significant accomplishments thus far. In this context, our vision will be fulfilled if students and parents, faculty and staff, alumni and friends, peers and colleagues, and the community at large see Western as:

**A place where engaged learning inspires academic excellence and social responsibility.**