

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Western's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) theme of *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society* is based on the premise that students who are more actively involved in their education will learn more, and thus be more successful during their educational careers and beyond. If we can increase the proportion of students who are meaningfully engaged during their education, we will ultimately enhance students' learning and the quality of their educational experiences, which will help to advance Western toward its vision of becoming a leading comprehensive university nationally.

We believe that systematically incorporating relevant societal issues into students' educational training, in forms such as (a) active learning approaches and multidisciplinary coursework, (b) applied scholarship, service learning, leadership and other experiential learning opportunities, and (c) increased commitment to promoting internationalism and appreciation for diverse ideas, cultures and peoples, we will place students' learning in a more practical and professionally-oriented context demanded by today's global marketplace. At the same time, this approach will advance students' understanding of their place in the world and the role of their discipline in modern society.

Foundation and Core Philosophy

The QEP theme 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."

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.

QEP Concept

Implementation of our QEP will be organized around a number of broad action initiatives designed to engage students with communities other than their own as part of their *Western Experience*. This concept envisions the university at the center of a broader community in which students can both learn and contribute. Through these action initiatives, we will work to realize our central QEP learning goal:

Students will engage with communities other than their own in purposeful learning activities that explicitly address their capacity and responsibility to contribute to community and society.

This goal is linked to three attendant student learning outcomes:

Outcome 1: Students will demonstrate their capacity to apply knowledge and training to address relevant concerns in community or society.

Outcome 2: Students will demonstrate respect for diversity of peoples, ideas and cultures.

Outcome 3: Students will demonstrate awareness of their opportunities as responsible citizens living and working in a global society.

Over a period of five years, the university will implement new action initiatives directly tied to the three targeted student learning outcomes. **We will hold ourselves accountable to SACS for demonstrating measurable positive change in our student learning outcomes as a result of implementing these action initiatives.** At the same time, the university will support additional activities and initiatives to assure administrative infrastructure and advance the professional development of faculty and staff in ways necessary to achieve the targeted learning outcomes.

By linking the curriculum to issues and opportunities drawn from the broader community, the plan promotes increased student learning and the development of educated citizens. This approach places students' educational training in a more practical and more engaged context as the most potent approach to educating student-citizens in the modern world.

Targeted student learning outcomes include students' knowledge, skills, behavior and values. As such, the learning, competitiveness and potential for success of our graduates will be enriched. In addition, our plan will establish a culture of engagement at Western that will propel us toward our institutional goal of becoming a comprehensive institution of national prominence.

Implementation

QEP learning outcomes have been placed in a curricular context, with desired **goals and indicators that are to be faculty owned, developed by and relevant to individual units' particular contribution to the overall university strategic priorities.** As such, academic resources will be brought to bear on the success of the QEP without compromising overall academic effectiveness and efficiency.

The university will establish QEP leadership to coordinate implementation and assessment of the plan. The Leadership Team will consist of a small number of individuals from relevant units, and will be coordinated by an individual operating out of the Office of the Provost. The Leadership Team will facilitate development of annual implementation priorities, make recommendations regarding funding for QEP initiatives, and help individuals and units develop student learning programs that advance QEP goals.

Personnel and unit evaluation, planning and outcomes assessment procedures will be aligned with QEP goals and priorities. This will ensure that all individuals and units share accountability for the success of QEP initiatives. **Recognition and reward systems will be linked to success in advancing QEP goals. The university has committed significant resources to advance academic quality, with special emphasis on facilitating QEP implementation.**

We have identified 10 initial actions designed to impact student learning at Western. These are listed in no particular order of importance. Direct implementation will be supported by activities that establish associated institutional infrastructure or human capacity.

Action 1: Create an engagement-based University Honors Program that will serve as a model of engaged learning and attract academically-talented students nationwide.

Action 2: Incorporate ethical aspects of the discipline and professionalism standards into major programs of study and/or general education.

Action 3: Align the outcomes of service learning in the discipline with the knowledge and skills developed through the curriculum.

Action 4: Ensure engagement experiences are relevant to students' degree programs and promote awareness of the relationship of the discipline to society and the broader community.

Action 5: Initiate civic or social involvement, along with discussions of social responsibility and personal autonomy, in the Freshman Experience.

Action 6: Develop Winter, May and/or Summer Term offerings to provide diverse opportunities for study abroad and other experiential learning opportunities to diverse groups of students.

Action 7: Develop a co-curricular resume/passport system to promote and track students' participation in experiential and service learning.

Action 8: Use the Alive Center, the Leadership Center, Student Life, Career Services, Advising Center and Freshman Experience as points of entry for students' involvement in community service, service learning, experiential education and leadership activities.

Action 9: Establish a Class Legacy Program whereby each student cohort addresses one significant university, social or civic issue during its tenure at Western.

Action 10: Institute or orient first-year activities to initiate students to university opportunities and expectations and highlight the passage of first-year students from high school to the university environment.

Assessment

Efforts will be assessed by linking student learning goals and targeted learning outcomes to specific performance indicators. While the university will establish expectations regarding goals to be addressed and outcomes to be targeted by each action initiative, specific performance indicators will be developed by individual units. **Thus, individual academic programs will serve as the direct points of accountability for documenting positive impacts on student learning.** This will ensure that goals and outcomes are faculty-owned, locally-relevant, and well-integrated with the curriculum.

In assessing and documenting results, existing planning, evaluation and outcomes assessment processes will be utilized. There will be continued reliance on measures such as NSSE and WKUSES, as well as examination of additional instruments, such as MSLQ, to quantify students' perception of the learning environment and their growth as intentional learners.

The QEP Leadership Team will also oversee an annual reflective assessment of our progress, involving extraction of relevant data from institutional planning, evaluation and outcomes assessment procedures. The QEP Leadership Team will also be responsible for generating a five-year review and plan assessment.

Chronology of the Plan's Development

Development of the QEP began in Fall 2002 with the Provost's charge to the university SACS Leadership Team to identify an appropriate theme for Western's QEP that would enhance student learning. The chosen theme of *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society* was recommended by the SACS Leadership Team to the Provost, who in turn recommended that theme to the President. Once the theme was selected, a QEP Steering Committee was appointed to draft the QEP document, calling on both internal and external data and resources. This committee began its work in Fall 2003, and since that time has worked closely with the SACS Leadership Team and the Provost to develop the QEP.

The QEP Steering Committee included faculty, staff and students representing all facets of the university community. Academic and academic support units were surveyed as to their approaches and challenges to promoting engaged learning, and invited to provide comments and propose specific initiatives throughout development of the QEP. The plan's goals and objectives were shared with faculty and staff in Fall 2003. Discussions of the direction, goals and objectives, and strategies for implementation and assessment continued throughout the course of the 2004-2005 academic year. Draft sections of the QEP have been available to all university personnel on the university's dedicated QEP web site (<http://www.wku.edu/qep/>).

From the onset, we chose to view the SACS Quality Enhancement Plan requirement as an opportunity to affect the university aspirational and transformation goals by further enhancing quality of student learning. The ambitious theme, *Engaging Students for Success in a Global Society*, was chosen with that spirit in mind. The QEP Steering Committee took seriously its multiple tasks: to develop a plan with integrity that moves the institution forward and meets the SACS requirements; to be inclusive, building grassroots support and institutional ownership; to focus on outcomes that enhance student learning.

The Committee's first efforts generated a plan that went through multiple points of review, ultimately being distilled and refined into this current document. It was particularly challenging to ensure the requirements of SACS for the QEP were met while also capturing the momentum and commitment reflected in the ambitious scope reflected in the work of the QEP Steering Committee. Like all struggles that involve people with institutional commitment to enhance student learning and passion for ideas, the process was arduous and filled with spirited debate. In the end, we coalesced around a document that we believe balances our need to set forth a well-defined approach to advancing student learning while retaining a strong commitment to challenge all facets of our institution to higher levels of excellence.

In broadest terms, the university has identified a set of focused student learning objectives, which in turn have been translated into a set of recommendations and proposed modes and time lines for implementation, with identified points of accountability. Our plan is ambitious and forward-looking, yet is well-grounded in those principles and traditions that have long defined the *Western Experience*. We enter this process with the benefit of strong support among all facets of the university community.