

Formative Evaluation of the Quality Enhancement Plan

October 20, 2008

Overview of the Quality Enhancement Plan

The creation of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a requirement for continued SACS accreditation. Selection of a QEP theme and implementation of programs under a university QEP provides an opportunity for institutions to focus on well-defined issues or concerns directly related to the improvement of student learning. For its first Quality Enhancement Plan, the University of West Florida selected the theme, *Enhancing Student Learning: Creating Communities of Learners through Active Learning and Student Engagement – Focus on Project Management*. Project Management emerged as a focus for the QEP because it captured an important aspect of the undergraduate experience at UWF. First, the prevalence of smaller-enrollment classes (versus large lecture formats) enables students at UWF to complete projects as part of class assignments. Second, as a regional comprehensive university that values undergraduate education, students have opportunities to work closely with faculty on projects outside of class. Third, the project concept provided opportunities for co-curricular and extra-curricular experiences that contribute to student learning in the project management domain.

Quality Enhancement Plan Goals

The QEP was designed with three overarching goals:

- Improve student learning of knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to Project Management
- Increase the use of active learning and student engagement instructional strategies, especially for the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities related to Project Management
- Provide opportunities for faculty and staff development related to improving student learning of Project Management.

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan

The organizational structure created for the QEP has evolved during the implementation of the QEP. Some of this evolution was the result of purposeful restructuring due to organizational learning but much was driven by environmental factors such as staffing changes and budget reductions.

Oversight of the QEP has been a continuing challenge. The initial management organization consisted of two co-directors (the AVP for Student Affairs and the Director of the Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment). Several changes occurred in the early years of this implementation. The Director of CUTLA retired and, after a failed search process which took several months, was replaced with an Interim Director and then a permanent Director. During this transition the AVP for Academic Affairs effectively became a third co-director. The AVP for Academic Affairs left the University and was not replaced. The QEP is now co-directed by the AVP for Student Affairs and the current Director of CUTLA. In addition to difficulties associated with turnover among QEP Directors, the QEP co-directors manage a variety of obligations related to their primary assignments. Management of day-to-day deadlines associated with QEP initiatives was improved by assigning administrative tasks to the Administrative Assistant for CUTLA. Since making this change, administration of routine tasks related to implementation of the QEP has improved considerably. We strongly recommend that all future Quality Enhancement Plans include provisions for appropriate professional and support staff to ensure that day-to-day operations associated with implementation of a QEP can be managed effectively.

The original organizational structure included four committees with specific responsibilities. This structure and the associated committee experienced mixed results. The QEP Request for Proposals Review Committee has been a fairly active committee whereas other committees have never met (Faculty/Staff Development Committee) or were never populated with members (Scholarship and Grants Committee). The QEP Evaluation Committee did meet but struggled with its assignment. As part of the formative evaluation of the QEP during the QEP Retreat (September 10, 2007) and the formative evaluation meeting (April 29, 2008), participants discussed the intended role of these committees and how well this role had been communicated to committee members.

Communications about the expectations for QEP project proposals need to be improved. Normal turnover of committee membership needs to be addressed. Recruiting additional faculty onto these committees could serve as an additional mechanism for engaging a broader group of faculty in the work of the QEP. Committees that had never met or were never populated were disbanded.

The University underwent a series of budget exercises during 2007-2008 that severely reduced funding for the QEP. The budget cuts reduced funding for the CUTLA Fellows program (funds remain for only one Fellow position to continue through 2008-2009). All funding for additional QEP projects was lost. Because the QEP is moving into its final years and the focus will shift from implementation to evaluation of impact, no additional QEP projects will be budgeted. The Proposals Review Committee was disbanded. These budget cuts also generated staffing reductions which created additional work load issues for the co-directors, each of whom assumed additional duties within their respective divisions due to unfilled positions.

Recommendations for changes and rationale

Evaluation of Evidence Regarding Achievement of QEP Goals

The original QEP document identified three related sets of strategies for achieving these goals and objectives. Specific data related to the strategies employed to achieve each of the three goals are provided in Appendix A: Strategies and Goals of the QEP.

Goal 1: Improve student learning of knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to Project Management.

Strategies related to the Academic Learning Compacts

1. Develop Academic Learning Compact (ALC) documents that include student learning outcomes in each of five domains (content, critical thinking, communication, integrity/values, and project management) for all undergraduate programs. ALC documents will include an assessment plan that specifies direct measures used to assess student learning. ALCs will be posted to the CUTLA web site. Departments will provide links from their web site to the relevant ALC.
2. Develop Academic Learning Plan (ALP) documents that include student learning outcomes in each of five domains (content, critical thinking, communication, integrity/values, and project management) for all graduate programs. ALP documents will include an assessment plan that specifies direct measures used to assess student learning. ALPs will be posted to the CUTLA web site. Departments will provide links from their web site to the relevant ALP.
3. Assessment of changes in student learning will be reported yearly in departmental Annual Reports. As relevant, departments will report on the assessment of student learning in

courses offered as part of the Academic Foundations/General Studies curriculum, undergraduate degree programs, and graduate programs. Reports will include documentation of the use of assessment evidence for continuous improvement of programs and improvement of assessment strategies.

Goal 2: Increase the use of active learning and student engagement instructional strategies, especially for the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities related to Project Management.

Strategies related to Faculty Development

1. Fellows program housed in the Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment. Fellows are appointed for up to two years in one of three areas: mentoring, instructional strategies, and assessment. Fellows assist the Director of CUTLA with the creation and delivery of faculty development activities to promote professional development and expertise with instructional strategies and assessment practices.
2. On-campus workshops offered for faculty, adjunct faculty, and graduate teaching assistants.
3. Resources provided to send faculty to regional and national workshops and conferences that emphasize active learning and assessment.
4. External consultants will be brought to campus to provide workshops and other faculty development activities. Consultations will focus on active learning, student engagement, project management, and assessment strategies.
5. Implement opportunities for UWF faculty to exchange best practices for active learning and student engagement.
6. Showcase pilot projects funded under the QEP (dissemination of new programs to the larger campus community).
7. Develop faculty resources on the CUTLA web site.
8. Establish Faculty Learning Communities to promote new instructional strategies and project management skill. (This strategy is a new initiative that was not identified in the original or revised QEP Report. FLCs were initiated by the new CUTLA director.)

Goal 3: Provide opportunities for faculty and staff development related to improving student learning of Project Management.

Strategies related to Quality Enhancement Projects

1. Fund QEP projects that promote student engagement with an emphasis on project management.
2. Disseminate findings from QEP projects in a campus-wide forum.
3. Post final reports from completed QEP projects to the CUTLA web site.
4. Dissemination of work related to the QEP projects to the larger academic community through conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications.

The attached matrix lists these strategies describes the evidence of their implementation, and the evidence of the impact of these strategies. This matrix will serve as the general plan for the summative evaluation of the QEP for the Fifth Year Report to SACS.

Recommendations for Remainder of the Quality Enhancement Plan (2008-2010)

The QEP Steering Committee and Leadership Team made the following recommendations for completion of work related to the current Quality Enhancement Plan:

1. Within the current budget constraints, any funding that might be reinstated to the QEP budget should be held in reserve against future budget reductions. If funding is still intact in the spring of 2009, the co-directors should consider sending a team of faculty from Academic Foundations/General Studies to a conference related to reform of the General Education curriculum.
2. One additional QEP project was identified for funding in 2008-2009. This will be the final QEP-funded faculty project. The remainder of work related to the current QEP will be directed toward supervising the completion of current projects, ongoing faculty development activities, and completion of the summative assessment of the QEP.
3. The RFP Committee (Proposal Review Committee) was disbanded as no future projects will be funded.
4. The next year will be devoted to planning and collecting data relevant to the impact of the QEP on student learning. Because the QEP focuses on project management, assessment reports from departmental Annual Reports of assessments that address student learning outcomes in the project management domain will be harvested for evaluating the impact of the QEP. The Annual Report template will be modified to improve the ability to capture evidence of changes in student learning related to project management skills that occur over time. At present, departments are asked to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning and describe curriculum changes motivated by this information. The new template will ask departments to make specific comparisons of performance in the current year to performance in previous years.
5. Establish a timeline for creating committees, identifying relevant data, and writing the Impact Report that will accompany the Fifth Year Report to SACS.