

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)

Call for Papers

As part of the SACS reaffirmation process, the University of South Carolina must submit a proposal for a five-year project aimed at improving student learning. Choosing the topic of the QEP must involve input and buy-in from all University constituencies. As such, the Provost is issuing a call to all faculty, students, and staff to submit QEP topic proposals. Cash prizes of \$2,500 will be awarded to the four best papers as determined by the review process described later in this document.

Guidelines¹

QEP Description

The QEP is the component of the accreditation process that reflects and affirms the commitment of the Commission on colleges to the enhancement of the quality of higher education and to the proposition that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. By definition, the QEP describes a carefully designed course of action that addresses a well-defined and focused topic or issue related to enhancing student learning. The QEP should be embedded within the institution's ongoing integrated institution-wide planning and evaluation process and may very well evolve from this existing process. The QEP is required under Core Requirement 2.12:

2.12 The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of the institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.

Selecting a topic

Since Core Requirement 2.12 demands "a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment," an exploration of USC's culture, strategic planning, goals, mission, and assessment results is a good place to begin the search for an appropriate topic. Tapping into issues centered on student learning where shared interests, concerns, and aspirations have already surfaced or where data have already been collected and analyzed may prove fruitful.

Consider that the topic for the QEP need not be a brand new idea. For example, an institution might develop a QEP that extends, modifies, redirects, or strengthens an

¹ Excerpts from the [SACS PDF on Quality Enhancement Plans](#)

improvement that is already underway. An institution might also develop a QEP that has been in the planning stages prior to the beginning of preparations for reaffirmation. An institution may not, however, submit a QEP that describes initiatives that are fully realized.

Institutions are encouraged to base their selection of the topic for the QEP on empirical data and an analysis of these data. The institution may wish to examine studies that have been done on best practices in higher education and other national and peer group data derived from carefully designed research. A QEP topic based on a needs assessment, for example, will have more validity and credibility than one that does not. Not only will recognized, substantive issues likely have a good chance of getting the institution's stakeholders to support both the development and implementation of the plan, but they may also protect the institution from receiving a recommendation calling for clearer description of "the current status of the programs that are cited to be improved in order to better identify the need for the initiative. Data such as attendance figures, survey feedback, student satisfaction and nationally standardized measures are examples of information that can be used to justify the need for improvement."

Whatever the source of inspiration, institutions should ensure that the QEP clearly establishes the importance of the topic so that peer evaluators can understand its value and appropriateness to the institution. The On-Site Review Committee will expect the institution to have selected an issue of substance and depth.

Scope. A critical factor in the selection of the topic is the determination of the scope of the initiative. While the QEP is not expected to touch the life of every student at the institution, the topic does need to be sufficiently broad to be viewed as significant to the institution and as a major enhancement to student learning. On the other hand, it also needs to be focused enough to provide a manageable framework for development and implementation.

One might argue that an institution has the right to select a broad, complex issue for its QEP, and certainly it does. Doing so, however, demands that extra care be taken in demonstrating to the peer reviewers the institution's capacity for implementing and sustaining the initiative. Viable QEP topics include, but are not limited to, enhancing the academic climate for student learning, strengthening the general studies curriculum, developing creative approaches to experiential learning, enhancing critical thinking skills, introducing innovative teaching and learning strategies, increasing student engagement in learning, and exploring imaginative ways to use technology in the curriculum. In all cases, goals and evaluation strategies must be clearly and directly linked to improving the quality of student learning. For a list of sample titles of QEPs previously submitted for Commission review, go to the list of [SACS QEP Executive Summaries](#).

Finally, consider whether or not the selected topic requires definition. The appropriateness of topics such as “Critical Thinking” and “Academic Literacy,” for example, may be self-evident, but the precise meaning of these terms may not be quite so apparent because both topics include a range of skills. Taking the time now to develop operational definitions of terms such as these will pay dividends when establishing student learning outcomes and assessment plans.

Submitting a QEP Proposal

The QEP proposal must be submitted to the Provost by October 30, 2009. The proposal should not exceed 5 double-spaced pages (excluding the list of references) and can be in any format. However, the proposal will be rated on the following criteria:

- Is there a clear and concise description of a significant issue at USC directly related to student learning?
- What are the goals of the QEP and how do they relate to student learning?
- What are the benefits of the QEP to students and to USC?
- How does the QEP relate to the University mission, vision, and the Focus Carolina reports?
- Are there empirical data/needs assessment supporting the need for the QEP?
- Is a list of references covering best practices relating to the QEP topic included?

The QEP Proposal Review Process

A group of two administrators, three faculty members chosen by the Faculty Senate, one of whom is from a regional campus, and two students will review all proposals. This committee will then select the QEP proposals that appear most promising according to the above guidelines. The SACS vice president assigned to USC will be consulted as to the feasibility of the top ranked proposals. In December, the committee will finalize the recommendation and present it to the Faculty Senate for approval.