

USCCONNECT

Integrating learning within and beyond the classroom

<http://www.sc.edu/provost/qep/>

The University of South Carolina's (USC) Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), *USC Connect: Integrative Learning Within and Beyond the Classroom*, focuses on helping students intentionally select and engage in a broad array of within- and beyond-the-classroom learning experiences, make productive **connections** between theory and practice, and ultimately synthesize and apply learning to new, complex situations. Research shows that integrative learning is critically important to enhancing education for *all* students. USC is in a particularly advantageous position to develop and demonstrate how this can be accomplished at a comprehensive, research university.

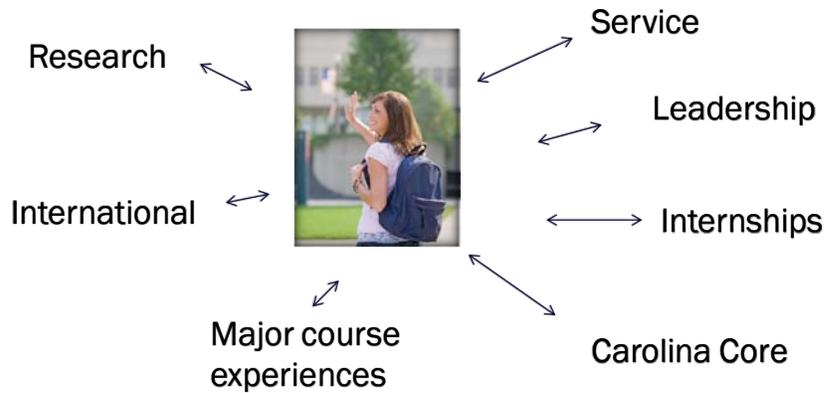
How it will work: The vision of *USC Connect* begins with students **intentionally selecting experiences** which will enrich their lives and academic work. A unique **technology** platform will draw from databases of experiences, academic resources, user interests, and other information to provide access and make recommendations regarding opportunities that meet students' needs. For example, a student interested in the Mediterranean may have experiences that deepen her understanding such as joining the Spanish Language House, contacting faculty members with connections to the region, enrolling in relevant course work, attending special events (e.g., seminar on Greek cooking), and studying abroad. **The student will reflect** on her experiences as she writes, creates, and develops projects related to the Mediterranean; develops an e-portfolio of university career; and engages in discussions with peers, faculty, and professional staff on what her experiences mean (e.g., understanding the issues, people, and culture of the Mediterranean; considering how that relates to her own life; developing skills in learning about different cultures; informing her future interactions; and influencing her career choices.) New technologies will assist in tracking and assessing students' experiences and their abilities in integrating learning.

USC's framework: Within and beyond the classroom experiences at USC are framed by academic majors and high impact activities (Research, Community Engagement, International Studies, and Leadership). Experiences include (1) brief or one-time opportunities (e.g., a lecture or one-day service activity) that provide breadth of exposure and introduce students to possible paths, and (2) extensive involvements that systematically integrate student reflection with academic learning and assess student ability to make in-depth connections (e.g., internships, study abroad, undergraduate research projects, a long term community project). Opportunities to re-think, reflect on, and apply experiences overtime will occur through such venues as integrative courses in majors, student initiated e-portfolios, and student communities of practice.

Building on strengths: Faculty and staff at USC already provide students with a wealth of beyond the classroom (BTC) learning experiences. USC's technology transformation is in process and will ultimately provide tools for students, faculty, and staff to identify, select, record and assess experiences. USC's highly successful first-year experiences will provide a vehicle for introducing students to beyond the classroom experiences and integrative learning. USC's Center for Teaching Excellence and Student Affairs programs are well established and will support faculty and staff in connecting with one another and developing approaches to help students integrate experiences throughout their collegiate careers. *USC Connect* further enhances USC's outstanding educational environment by building on these and other strengths.

Why it matters: More than ever, USC graduates will be lifelong learners who effectively and creatively integrate and apply what they know and can do to new contexts in ways that make a positive difference in the world.

Step 1: Intentionally select experiences



Students choose within and beyond the classroom experiences consistent with their needs, interests, career, and life goals. Innovative technology supports coordination and selection of opportunities.

Step 2: Meaningfully connect and apply experiences

Students connect within and beyond the classroom experiences through reflection, discussion, and creation of unique products (e.g., research projects, e-portfolios).

Integrative Learning!



New learning is applied to make decisions and solve problems in new contexts.