Why the QEP Theme and Goals will contribute to a successful QEP

Georgia College is currently in the process of seeking reaffirmation of its accreditation by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). One of the “core requirements” of our reaffirmation is the development of a Quality Enhancement Plan. SACSCOC describes a successful Quality Enhancement Plan as

. . . a carefully designed and focused course of action that *addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s)* emerging from institutional assessment and *focuses on enhancing student learning* or the environment supporting student learning. Student learning is defined broadly in the context of the QEP and may address a wide range of topics or issues but, in all cases, the goals and evaluation strategies need to be *clearly and directly linked to improving the quality of student learning* and be *consistent with the institution’s strategic plan*. (Italics added for emphasis.)

In addition, SACSCOC expects that a successful Quality Enhancement Plan will reflect

• Broad-based involvement of university stakeholders,

* Alignment with mission of institution,
* A focused topic, centered on student learning,
* Demonstrated institutional capacity, including sufficient budgetary, material, and human resources, and
* A thorough assessment plan.

How do the theme, “Building a Culture of Engaged Learning,” and the goals, “Through engaged learning in and beyond the classroom Georgia College students will

* develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become informed citizen leaders;
* serve the public good, locally and globally”

meet these criteria?

**Broad-based involvement of university stakeholders**: The steps the Task Force has taken to meet this criterion are listed in Supporting Document 2, QEP Timeline. The Task Force is committed to maintaining an open, transparent process as it continues to develop the QEP proposal. Presenting the theme and goal statements for Senate endorsement is one means of ensuring that this criterion is met. Posting an open call for faculty, staff, and students to join the QEP Task Force is another means. The Task Force has created a space on minutes.gcsu.edu to post minutes for all future Task Force meetings and has requested that GC Communications create on opt-in listserv for the Quality Enhancement Plan as a way by which faculty, students, and staff can stay informed of and make contributions to the future development of the Plan. The Task Force will also continue to hold open forums and dialogues throughout the Fall and Spring semesters.

**Alignment with mission of institution**: The theme of engaged learning and goal of developing informed citizen leaders capable of serving the public good are well-aligned with the mission and values of the institution. They conform perfectly with the following statement from our Mission: “[Georgia College’s] academically *engaging*, student-centered programs often take *learning beyond the traditional classroom* and develop the intellectual, professional, and *civic skills and dispositions* that enable graduates to thrive in an information-intensive and diverse global society.”(Italics added for emphasis)

The wording of the goal statements comes directly from the following value statement:

**Opportunities for Community Engagement**. Georgia College values collaboration with community partners to address mutually identified needs and to promote public well-being through teaching, learning, scholarship, and outreach. Community engagement advances Georgia College students’ academic and civic learning. It also helps them become more *informed citizen leaders ready to serve the public good, locally and globally*. (Italics added for emphasis)

Furthermore, a focus on engaged learning directed at preparing students to be informed citizen leaders able to serve the public good is ideal in terms of communicating the University’s distinctiveness as a public liberal arts college.

**A focused topic, centered on student learning**: Although the theme, “Building a Culture of Engaged Learning,” provides a general topic for our QEP, in itself, the theme is not focused enough to meet SACSCOC expectations. A focused topic must provide an answer to the questions, “For what are you ‘building a culture of engaged learning?’ “To what ends?” Those questions are answered by the goal statement: “Through engaged learning in and beyond the classroom Georgia College students will

* develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become informed citizen leaders;
* serve the public good, locally and globally.”

Our QEP will become even more focused as the Task Force further refines the specific student learning outcomes aligned with our proposed theme and goals, in particular specifying the “knowledge, skills, and dispositions.”

However, focused goals and student learning outcomes do not require a specific pedagogical approach. The goal statement does not specify any one type of engaged learning strategy other than to state that engaged learning should occur in and beyond the classroom. A variety of engaged learning strategies – as diverse as undergraduate research, service learning, internships, apprenticeships, and others – can and should be incorporated to enable students to “develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become informed citizen leaders” and “serve the public good, locally, and globally.”

**Demonstrated institutional capacity, including sufficient budgetary, material, and human resources**: Georgia College’s institutional record of supporting engaged learning demonstrates that we have the institutional capacity to implement a QEP with a focus on engaged learning in and beyond the classroom [in which] Georgia College students will

* develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become informed citizen leaders;
* serve the public good, locally and globally.”

Past and ongoing support for engaged learning has occurred through the devotion of budgetary and human resources through professional development programming, professional development grants for faculty and staff, and the creation of a University Center for Engaged Learning (now the Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship), as well as committing funds to support undergraduate research.

The implementation of the QEP will require new resources and the Task Force is in the process of preparing a budget proposal for the first year of the QEP which will be submitted to the provost as part of the Fiscal Year 2015 budget process. The Task Force is also drafting an implementation plan that will be submitted in draft form to the Senate in November of 2013. However, in addition to these current and future resources, our most valuable resource is the collective knowledge, skill, motivation and dedication of our faculty, students, and professional staff members.

**A thorough assessment plan**: The QEP Task Force has drafted student learning outcomes associated with the theme and goals and will continue to refine those outcomes. The Task Force has also identified several direct and indirect measures and assessment methods related to those outcomes and will pilot one assessment mechanism during the Fall 2013 semester. Indeed, a committee of the Task Force, which includes the University Coordinator of Assessment and several faculty members with expertise in the assessment of student learning, has been created to finalize the outcomes and the appropriate “measures” for assessing those outcomes. The Task Force will keep the Senate updated on the progress of the student learning outcome statements and the assessment plan.