



Western Carolina University's QEP

Synthesis: A pathway to intentional learning

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Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning at WCU is committed to enhancing student learning especially as it relates to students synthesizing their university experiences. The plan will guide undergraduates as they develop personal learning and career goals and help shape students' experiences throughout their time at WCU as they engage in their academic and co-curricular experiences. The plan will also prompt students to reflect on how those experiences contribute to their goals after graduation.

Departments that have impact on students, such as academic programs, Residential Living, Orientation, Advising, Student Support Services, as well as programs that directly impact the academic life of faculty or students, for example, the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence, Career Services and the Center for Service Learning, will become increasingly involved in the implementation of the QEP. These units, in conjunction with the academic programs, will develop specific goals that align with the plan and foster synthesis in our students, as well as initiate more engaged teaching pedagogies in our faculty.

Advisors and faculty will enter the mentoring process using an Education Briefcase. This electronic portal will facilitate student interactions with faculty, advisors, and career counselors and will serve as a repository for sharing learning plans, resumes, academic and co-curricular transcripts, templates, questions and prompts from the advisor, student reflections/essays on university activities, and other synthesis-related documentation. Students will use the Education Briefcase to chart their educational progress, professional and social activities, experiential learning, and future educational/career plans. Advisors and faculty will use the additional information available in the Education Briefcase to understand more fully the student's total education to better advise and guide a student through her decision-making processes.

Over time, the intent of the QEP is to develop students who are more intentional about the choices they make in their academic work, their co-curricular experiences and civic responsibilities, their internships and co-ops, research engagements, and their long range education or career goals. By focusing on synthesis, students will develop a context for their learning and their experiences, leading to a deeper mastery of their discipline and a more comprehensive world view. Students who develop a set of goals early in their college career and who are guided to reflect on what they are experiencing are more inclined to persist to graduation and achieve greater academic and personal success.

Please visit the WCU SACS Web site at www.wcu.edu/sacs to see our QEP.

Western Carolina University
Quality Enhancement Plan Impact Report
Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning

1. A succinct list of the initial goals and intended outcomes of the Quality Enhancement Plan

The purpose of Western Carolina University's (WCU) QEP, *Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning*, was to prepare graduates to synthesize knowledge, skills, and experiences from their academic and co-curricular preparation to:

- 1) identify their aptitudes, abilities, and interests and articulate their future goals and aspirations;
- 2) modify behaviors and values in response to knowledge and skills gained from their academic and co-curricular experiences; and
- 3) recognize the synthesis of their university experiences and evaluate those experiences relative to their future education and career goals.

WCU's QEP was designed to empower students to become intentional participants in their own learning, foster their ability to understand themselves, increase their intellectual flexibility and versatility, and develop their capacity for integrated learning. The plan was designed to promote synthesis across disciplines, coordinate curricular and co-curricular experiences, and prevent the fragmented approach that often accompanies undergraduate education. WCU's QEP used synthesis and intentional and integrative learning as cornerstones of the educational framework, and reflected WCU's mission of engaged and experiential learning.

2. A discussion of changes made to the QEP and the reasons for making those changes

The QEP was originally designed:

- to be implemented in a linear model by year, beginning with entering freshmen through transition to college courses, 200 and 300 level major and gateway courses for sophomores and juniors, and concluding with capstone courses for seniors; the implementation also provided for the collaboration of campus units to provide students a holistic experience for our students;
- to be captured via an electronic portfolio designed to foster synthesis in students and serve as a capture point for assessment of the student learning outcomes (secondary function).
- to be assessed using the following: selected student work; focus groups; advisor evaluations; sophomore survey; graduating senior survey; ASSIST (Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students); BCSSE (Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement); FSSE (Faculty Survey of Student Engagement); NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement); and CLA (Collegiate Learning Assessment).

It became apparent early on (e.g., focus groups with faculty and students) that the synergy necessary between academic and student affairs to foster synthesis early in undergraduate students' careers would benefit from a consolidating entity. Therefore, the Office for Undergraduate Studies and a full time administrator position (Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies) were established. Additionally, a new First Year Experiences (FYE) director's position was created to engage first year students in their educational journey (creating common, interconnected, interdisciplinary, engaged curricular and co-curricular learning experiences in first year seminars and transition to college courses) and to promote and support the QEP.

Each academic department and several academic support units within Academic and Student Affairs were asked to adapt elements of the QEP that were appropriate to their mission and program goals and submit a plan documenting their approach to fostering synthesis in students. The plan originally called for a staggered implementation over ten years. Based on feedback from the SACS Review team,

particularly the QEP Lead Evaluator, the implementation, including creation of administrative structures and resource support, was phased-in over five years.

Departing from the original plan of implementing the QEP beginning with the first year transition to college courses, the QEP Technology Committee worked with the faculty in the English Department to pilot use of the eBriefcase (e-portfolio) for the following reasons:

- Writing, Rhetoric, and Creative Studies (WRCS) captures more than two thirds of the entering freshmen enabling WCU to reach as many entering students as early as possible;
- WRCS had existing common assignments that strongly reflected many of the QEP learning outcomes, which would facilitate instructor participation in the QEP and assessment of student learning outcomes;
- WRCS required the completion of student portfolios and associated learning goals as established parts of the program; and
- The English Department had developed a strong QEP for the major that reflected a deep understanding of the principles of the QEP.

The QEP Assessment Committee quickly realized that, based on additional review of institutional mission and data as well as national trends, the three initial QEP goals needed to be refined and recast into achievable, measurable learning outcomes. The final learning outcomes for WCU's QEP are *integrate information from a variety of contexts, solve complex problems, communicate effectively and responsibly, practice civic engagement, and clarify and act on purpose and values*. Furthermore, the committee decentralized the assessment of these outcomes to the program level to ensure faculty buy-in, allow academic license, and to address limited human resources.

3. A description of the QEP's impact on student learning and/or the environment supporting student learning, as appropriate to the design of the QEP (to include the achievement of identified goals and outcomes, and any unanticipated outcomes of the QEP)

Due to the decentralization of the QEP, the implementation and assessment took place at both the institutional and departmental/program level.

Institutional Level

During the fall semester of 2007, three QEP implementation committees were established – Steering, Technology, and Assessment – each composed of faculty, staff, and administrators. The successful implementation of the QEP as originally conceived and as currently manifested relies upon these three committees to “implement, coordinate, and monitor the plan.” Each committee has a role in recognizing and facilitating changes in the environment supporting student learning and the work of each of these committees has had a significant impact on the implementation of the QEP.

The **QEP Steering Committee** was the primary body overseeing the implementation of the QEP. The members reviewed the original plan and, in addition to implementing the plan as originally conceived, they also created new avenues for faculty, staff, and students to implement the QEP by fostering and supporting civic engagement opportunities, interdisciplinary programs, undergraduate research, out-of-classroom professional and co-curricular activities and/or educational field trips (see below).

Excerpt from QEP Web site:

Undergraduate research, civic engagement and service learning, internships, field work, mentoring and advising, presentations at professional meetings, participation and leadership in social and professional organizations, international travel and study, and culminating capstone experiences are central elements of department plans to enhance the learning experience of our students. These funds [below] are allocated to support the QEP implementation [and] support faculty, student, and staff activity directly related to intentional, integrative, engaged teaching/learning and cannot be used for other purposes.

Please see below for opportunities to enhance the teaching/learning environment for our students/faculty.

- Undergraduate Research Educational Stipend (for students under faculty direction)
- QEP Development Grant (for faculty and staff)
- Undergraduate Academic Projects (for students and faculty)
- QEP Conference Travel Requests (for peer-reviewed student presentations at professional conferences)
- QEP Engagement – Non-conference Travel (for students)
- QEP Assessment Mini Grants (for faculty, students, and staff)

The **QEP Technology Committee** searched for an electronic portfolio system that would meet the formative and summative goals of students' pathway to intentional learning; i.e., a longitudinal portfolio that 1) incorporated space for students to reflect on artifacts chosen to represent their learning; 2) was customizable according to WCU's five global learning outcomes as well as flexible enough to accommodate discipline-specific requirements; 3) interfaced with WCU's existing student information and learning management systems; and 4) collected and depicted the often disparate parts of students' undergraduate experiences into one holistic venue. The e-portfolio system within Blackboard, WCU's learning management system, was selected after extensive development, testing, and feedback from students, staff, and faculty.

The **QEP Assessment Committee** crafted learning outcomes that could be operationalized within academic and student support programs during the earliest phase of implementation. After these were developed, metarubrics were created to:

- identify and describe shared expectations for learning for each outcome;
- represent how student learning should become progressively complex over time;
- provide flexible criteria for making judgments about student work that might result from a wide range of learning opportunities; and
- allow students to understand what is expected of them in terms of their learning at WCU.

These metarubrics provided descriptions of expectations ranging from *emerging*, through *developing* and *achieving*, to *exemplary* to guide the programs as they developed their own learning outcomes aligned with the QEP. The metarubrics also guided the QEP Assessment Committee as its members reviewed all academic QEP assessment plans.

Departmental/Program Level

Departmental/program level implementation began in 2007 with a volunteer pilot group: Recreational Therapy, History, Chemistry, and Health Information Administration. As of spring 2012, 42 of 55 programs have submitted a QEP assessment plan for review¹. After academic programs developed QEP assessment plans, they submitted impact reports on one or two learning outcomes (see summary below). Additionally, seven administrative or co-curricular units submitted impact reports.

Clarify and Act on Purpose and Values

Students will examine the values that influence their own decision making processes; take responsibility for their own learning and development in a manner consistent with academic integrity and their own goals and aspirations; intentionally use knowledge gained from learning experiences to make informed judgments about their future plans; and bring those plans into action.

Fourteen programs assessed the Clarify and Act on Purpose and Values learning outcome. While some focused on the outcome throughout a student's career, others focused solely on one to two specific

¹ This number is not reflective of total programs at WCU since some departments developed a QEP assessment plan for multiple programs.

courses. The variety of artifacts, capture points, and assessment methods includes self-assessment and reflection, pre- and post-internship evaluation, and external evaluations by faculty and supervisors.

Academic programs, such as Nutrition and Dietetics, Recreational Therapy, and Philosophy and Religion, were exemplars in achieving this outcome. In Nutrition and Dietetics, where students learn to apply professional guidelines through practice scenarios, students complete self-assessments to evaluate their mastery of this outcome, with more than half at *achieving or exemplary*. Recreational Therapy students complete pre- and post-internship self-assessments, and supervisors' input is sought regarding the students' acquisition of all learning outcomes. The program has seen a significant increase in mean scores between the pre- and post-internship self-assessments (3.18 to 3.78 out of 4), and the mean score from all students completing the capstone experience is higher for Clarify and Act on Purpose and Values outcome than all other outcomes (see appendix). In Philosophy and Religion, students write a guided reflection of their values and aims. Students then do a second self-assessment, in their final semester. Results indicate a significant increase (from 3.0 to 3.9 out of 4 on Reflection on values, and from 2.4 to 3.8 on Planning with purpose) between their sophomore and senior years.

Writing and Learning Commons' and Academic Success Program's achievement of the Clarify and Act on Purpose and Values outcome are good examples from academic support units. The Writing and Learning Commons (WaLC) assessed two different groups of students. Initially, tutors who work for the unit write reflective essays at the end of their training session to evaluate multiple program outcomes, including Clarify and Act on Purpose and Values. Students who use the services offered by WaLC are surveyed to find the reasons they attended or continue to attend tutoring sessions. WaLC concludes that students who self-refer for services or those who continue to return for services are able to clarify their purpose and values by taking responsibility for their own learning. The Academic Success Program (ASP), a summer bridge program for first-time freshmen who do not meet traditional enrollment standards, monitored successful enrollment at WCU as a program goal. These students are provided an avenue allowing them to clarify and act on their purpose and values, enhancing their ability to fulfill their goal of college attendance and success. ASP students saw an increase in freshman-to-sophomore retention from 83.7% to 91.2% from 2011 to 2012 (at the same time ASP increased its standards for success from a 2.0 GPA to a 2.5 GPA). ASP's fall-to-spring retention for the 2012 cohort is 90.99%, compared to 88.24% for the 2011 cohort.

Communicate Effectively and Responsibly

Students will convey complex information in a variety of formats and contexts; identify intended audience and communicate appropriately and respectfully.

Twenty-three programs reported on their efforts to assess the Communicate Effectively and Responsibly outcome. In some programs the outcome is delivered in specific QEP-focused courses, while in other programs it has been woven into the fabric of the curriculum. A variety of capture points and assessment methods are being used to collect data that demonstrates the impact on students' communication proficiency, including team-based senior capstone projects, competency evaluations, professional portfolios, undergraduate research, and participation in regional and national conferences.

One of WCU's greatest achievements in implementing the Communicate Effectively and Responsibly outcome is the extent to which WCU has embraced its role as a regionally engaged university and has involved a number of community and industry partners. Environmental Health, for example, provides real-world opportunities for students to practice communication skills by engaging students in community projects requiring them to address environmental health issues, gather data, develop recommendations, and make formal reports to the affected community. Similarly, Construction Management has incorporated a senior capstone project that requires student teams to act as general contractors for regional companies. In the last four years, 220 students' communication skills were

assessed using data from the American Institute of Constructors exam and capstone project-integrated rubrics; 67% of the students ranked excellent or satisfactory. Finally, Engineering Technology has developed a two-semester multidisciplinary senior capstone project sequence that pairs students with industry- and government-funded projects. According to 2011-2012 assessment data collected from Engineering Technology's capstone course sequence, 78.5% of students scored excellent or satisfactory on their ability to communicate effectively and responsibly.

Other notable achievements related to the Communicate Effectively and Responsibly learning outcome include:

- Approximately 20 Business Administration and Law students have co-authored published articles with faculty members in the last 5 years.
- 42 Criminal Justice students made research presentations at the 2012 WCU Undergraduate Expo; 6 students made presentations at the Southern Criminal Justice Association in October, 2012; and 4 students presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology in November, 2011.
- External professionals rated 80% of Communication students' professional portfolios as excellent; 15% good; and 5 % satisfactory. No unsatisfactory ratings were received.
- Motion Picture students created a collaborative film thesis that is conceived, written, filmed, edited, directed and acted by students, and screened at the Controlled Chaos Film Festival.

Practice Civic Engagement

Students will identify their roles and responsibilities as engaged citizens by considering the public policies that affect their choices and actions; by recognizing commonalities and interdependence of diverse views/values; and by acting responsibly to positively affect public policy.

Twelve departments and four academic support units cited examples of intentional programming or curricular tasks intended to impact students' achievement of practicing civic engagement. Many programs include service learning, which demand a high degree of integration between course goals/content and community, or practicing civic engagement as an expectation for the completion of the major, promote department-wide service activities, and/or sponsor student organizations which serve the university or local community. Academic support units have also been active in facilitating a climate of practicing civic engagement. The Center for Service Learning supports the implementation of projects by establishing connections with community partners and assisting academic programs in planning. Other units, like the Mountain Heritage Center, First Year Experience, and Career Services, connect students with targeted community engagement, internships, and co-operative education opportunities. Because of the diversity of implementation methods for this outcome, programs have established a variety of capture points and artifacts for assessment, such as reflective essays (at the course and program level), evaluation surveys, and external review.

Across the university, programs that promote student and faculty engagement in the university community and the region occur in individual courses/organizations, in programs, and, indeed, at the university level. In individual coursework, Nutrition and Dietetics assigned students to develop an educational session or educational strategy for a target population. Their 2011 assessment indicates that 84% of students self-rated as *achieving* or *exemplary*. Students in Communication Sciences and Disorders developed sound-awareness programs for early elementary school students as well as programs on the use and care of hearing aids at regional skilled nursing facilities. Out of the 42 students 97% indicated that the service learning project helped them apply the knowledge and skills of the respective subjects. The Communication Department involved students in public relations work in the nearby town of Dillsboro, in radio show re-creations in the Fine and Performing Arts Center, and in television work with the Department of Athletics. An external program reviewer cited departmental engagement work as a model for WCU in the spring of 2011. The Mediation Society, a student group

sponsored by Business Administration and Law, was awarded the 2009 WCU Student Integration of Learning Award for creating the Campus Mediation Program that facilitates conversation between disputing parties in the WCU community. WCU Mediation Team members placed third in the national Mediation Tournament, and won All-American Mediator, Outstanding New School, and top advocate. The Mountain Heritage Center, which offers more than 100 service learning opportunities yearly, has sponsored the student creation and publication of 37 videos, 44 essays, a technical manual on DigitalHeritage.org, a manual on disaster preparedness for the Mountain Heritage Center, and a chapter in the 2008 "Forest Stewardship Plan for the Waynesville Watershed." Similarly, the Honors College integrated the Practice Civic Engagement outcome into the newly-created 'Honors Path' curriculum, with the USI 101 – Honors Forum course, led by the Honors Board of Directors in conjunction with the American Red Cross, sponsoring the adoption of local counties to provide a variety of service projects and fundraising activities.

Solving Complex Problems

Students will identify the dimensions of complex issues or problems; analyze and evaluate multiple sources of information/data; apply knowledge and decision-making processes to new questions or issues; and reflect on the implications of their solution/decision.

Seventeen programs reported on their efforts to assess the Solving Complex Problems outcome. Two primary methods, undergraduate research and discipline-specific problem solving skills or artistic expression, have been used across a variety of academic programs to collect data and assess students' proficiency with complex problem solving. Both approaches to teaching and assessing problem solving skills reflect a significant impact on the institution's learning environment, and ultimately on student learning.

The Chemistry Department indicates that 25% of their undergraduate majors (including freshman and sophomores) participate in undergraduate research within the department, and some students participate in paid research opportunities during the summer. Chemistry students publish their findings in peer-reviewed journals and frequently make presentations at regional and national conferences, including the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR). Exit interviews with Chemistry students find that undergraduate research is the most rewarding experience in the major. Criminology and Criminal Justice indicated that 42 students made undergraduate research presentations at WCU's Undergraduate Expo, three students presented at state-level meetings, and four presented at a national meeting. Business Administration and Law includes undergraduate research at local, regional and national levels. Students in that program have provided 200 hours of research to local and national businesses.

The Engineering and Technology Department requires senior students to design a system, component or process in a real-world setting to address a real-world problem, initiating 45 senior projects over four years. These projects include the design of an LED system to assist treatment of prostate cancer, a rehabilitation device for patients with total knee replacement, and a solar apparatus used to heat water for industrial-grade food preparation. Engineering program faculty use the Comprehensive Assessment of Team Member Effectiveness to assess the capstone project process and reports that 80.4% of the students score as excellent or satisfactory. The Emergency Medical Care (EMC) program requires that students assume increasing responsibility as team leaders in scenarios within EMC laboratory courses. In 2012 100% of the students met the program requirements as measured by a comprehensive three-part exam, an evaluation by paramedic preceptors, and a scenario in which each student must serve as a team leader. Mathematics and Computer Science students demonstrate accumulated professional skills in capstone courses. The Mathematics program requires capstone students to write three papers of increasing disciplinary sophistication based on original research or detailed review of published articles. Computer Science students consolidate all of their programming skills into one year-

long software project. Past Computer Science software projects include “Chess Artificial Intelligence using Bitboards” and the development of a natural language parser. The School of Stage and Screen relies on a capstone course that focuses on production or performance. Stage and Screen students end their capstone course with a portfolio of work, Motion Picture and Television Production students collaborate in production of a film, and Theatre students perform in a public recital adjudicated by faculty.

Integrate Information from a Variety of Contexts

Students will make connections between personal interest and abilities, Liberal Studies, programs of study, general electives, and experiential learning opportunities, and other co-curricular activities; and relate the implications/value of these connections to ‘real world’ scenarios.

Nineteen programs reported assessment activities in implementing Integrating Information from a Variety of Contexts. Several programs reported using papers and projects that required the integration of information from various courses/disciplines, while other programs reported on the integration of course and professional career-related experiences and the integration of course material with community project execution. Measurement and evaluation of this learning outcome tended to involve papers, reports or projects, and students’ self-evaluations (some with accompanying supervisor reports) reflective of integrated capstone projects, internships, or coursework.

As part of an experiential trip set in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Geology students are required to answer a series of questions in which they synthesize material covered in the course (lecture and lab) and apply it in a real-world setting. A sample of 182 students submitted materials for assessment and evaluation by the instructor, with an average score of 83%. Similarly, within the Department of History, a team of faculty evaluated the outcome and attainment levels from students’ written work which required integration of information from multiple sources in a capstone contract that investigated local and regional historical issues. Program completers in the new Health and Physical Education dual licensure program in 2011-2012 utilized mock fitness data and information to develop a program of fitness, diet, and nutrition. The program synthesis was research-based and supported by current literature in exercise physiology, physical fitness, and nutrition. Students attained an average score of 80.88%. The Construction Management department’s capstone experience requires student teams to act as general contractors tasked with estimating, bidding, scheduling, and making financial projections for a construction project. The teams integrate curricular areas such as project management, estimation, ethics, scheduling, teaming, market analysis, contracts, legal issues, construction safety, project administration, and effective communication skills. In the last four years, 220 Construction Management students were assessed using data from the American Institute of Constructors exam and capstone project-integrated rubrics; aggregate frequency and percentage values over this period showed 76% of the students ranked as excellent or satisfactory. In the Writing and Learning Commons, tutors must integrate information from academic disciplines with knowledge of effective learning and tutoring strategies. Tutors’ reflective essays show an average score of 2.04 (out of 4) on this outcome.

Other programs, departments, or colleges that required an integrated capstone project, integrated internship, or integrated coursework included Nutrition and Dietetics, Recreational Therapy, School of Art and Design, School of Nursing, Biology, Business Administration and Law, and Environmental Science.

Overall Impact - Closing the Loop

As implementation of WCU’s QEP continues, departments are revising their programs to address the learning outcomes earlier in the curriculum and are working to improve advising in the majors. An example of this is the English Department’s creation of a 200-level course for all majors aimed at introducing students to the major and the career opportunities available to them. Similarly, Health and

Physical Education plans to move its QEP-related assignments into a course earlier in the curriculum to allow more time for faculty guidance prior to the student internship. Elementary Education and Middle Grades Education have adapted their research assignments to begin earlier and span several semesters. The Writing, Rhetoric and Critical Studies program revised the sophomore composition core requirement to focus on integrating perspectives from a variety of disciplines.

Another area in which a number of programs are revising their QEPs is assessment. Criminal Justice, for example, uses a case study approach that includes evaluation of problem solving skills and is developing a pre- and post-testing strategy to support this method. Emergency and Disaster Management program simulations suggest that student responses and behaviors are not closely aligned to the Solving Complex Problems outcome; therefore, even though their evaluation method is being used again this year, the program plans ongoing revisions to improve the assessment value of the exercise. As these examples illustrate, programs and departments across the university must develop methods of assessment that provide clear indications of how well objectives are being met.

Overall Impact - Institutional View

In assessing the impact of the QEP at the institution level, data supporting the initial QEP from 2006 was compared to data collected in 2010 and 2012. The data we analyzed included the Sophomore survey, the Graduating Senior survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), and WCU's graduation and retention rates.

Due to changes in the Sophomore survey in 2007², WCU is no longer able to compare student opinions of faculty contributions or of Career Services. The Graduating Senior survey, last conducted in spring 2010, shows mixed support of faculty and Career Services' role in student learning (see table below). Other items were no longer available for analysis.

| Graduating Senior Survey Item | 2006 | 2010 |
|--|------|------|
| Encouraging student to be actively involved in learning | 91% | 91% |
| Encouraging student-faculty interaction inside and outside the classroom | 91% | 86% |
| Overall opinion of Career Services for those who used their services | 77% | 70% |

The NSSE, a self-reporting survey of first- and fourth-year students, includes many questions related to WCU's QEP outcomes. Half of the items identified in the initial report (1d, 1i, 1k, 1o, 1s, 2c-e, 7h, 11e, 11m) and numerous other items related to the plan showed significant increases in one or both mean scores³ (see table below for significant results). These and many other NSSE item results are encouraging regarding the positive impacts of the QEP, and the results have been shared with the academic programs and academic support units.

| NSSE Item ⁴ [QEP Outcome] | Class Level | 2006 Avg Score | 2012 Avg Score |
|---|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| Worked on paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources (1d) [Integrate Information from a Variety of Contexts] | FR | 3.31 | 3.16 |
| Participated in a community-based project (1k) [Practice Civic Engagement] | FR | 1.74 | 1.91 |
| Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor (1o) [Clarify Purpose and Values] | SR | 2.71 | 2.60 |
| Coursework Emphasizes: Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences (2c) [Integrate Information from a Variety of Contexts] | FR | 2.84 | 3.09 |
| | SR | 3.00 | 3.18 |
| Coursework Emphasizes: Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or | SR | 2.99 | 3.16 |

² The Sophomore and Graduating Senior surveys are developed by University of North Carolina General Administration for collecting data from each member institution. Changes to this instrument are not under the control of WCU.

³ At .05 level.

⁴ Bold items were identified in original QEP documentation.

| | | | |
|---|----|------|------|
| methods (2d) [Integrate Information from a Variety of Contexts] | | | |
| Coursework Emphasizes: Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situation (2e) [Integrate Information from a Variety of Contexts] | FR | 3.01 | 3.18 |
| | SR | 3.21 | 3.40 |
| Community service or volunteer work (7b) [Practice Civic Engagement] | FR | 3.07 | 3.26 |
| | SR | 3.37 | 3.49 |
| Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements (7d) [Clarify Purpose and Values] | FR | 1.96 | 2.46 |
| Quality of relationships with faculty members (8b) [Clarify Purpose and Values] | SR | 5.64 | 5.82 |
| Quality relationships with administrative personnel and offices (8c) [Clarify Purpose and Values] | SR | 4.65 | 4.84 |
| Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically (10b) [Integrate Information from a Variety of Contexts] | FR | 3.10 | 3.34 |
| | SR | 2.90 | 3.10 |
| Writing clearly and effectively (11c) [Communicate Effectively and Responsibly] | SR | 3.04 | 3.21 |
| Thinking critically and analytically (11e) [Solve Complex Problems] | FR | 3.17 | 3.30 |
| | SR | 3.24 | 3.38 |
| Analyzing quantitative problems (11f) [Solve Complex Problems] | SR | 2.91 | 3.13 |
| Solving complex real-world problems (11m) [Solve Complex Problems] | SR | 2.68 | 2.91 |
| Contributing to the welfare of your community (11o) [Practice Civic Engagement] | FR | 2.50 | 2.69 |
| | SR | 2.43 | 2.62 |
| Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at this institution? (12) [Clarify Purpose and Values] | FR | 3.09 | 3.26 |
| | SR | 2.82 | 3.20 |
| How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution? (13) [Integrate Information from a Variety of Contexts] | FR | 3.20 | 3.37 |
| | SR | 3.16 | 3.30 |

In 2011-2012 WCU also administered the Collegiate Learning Assessment to first- and fourth-year students and compared those results to our previous administration in 2007-2008. WCU saw the value-added performance increase on the Analytic Writing Task (and the Make-an-Argument subtask) from below expected to near (or at) expected, while the Performance Task results show a decrease from above expected to near (or at) expected. Even though the results are mixed, they are encouraging due to WCU's focus on synthesis and integration, both highly related to the Analytic Writing Task and Make-an-Argument subtask.

Finally, analysis of our graduation and retention rates are greatly encouraging. WCU's retention rate has risen from 70.9% in 2004 to 72.0% in 2010 and 73.7% in 2012, with a high of 76.2% in 2008. This compares favorably to our peer⁵ average of 74.9% (with WCU's rate being the median) and to the UNC system of 82.1% in 2010 (up from 81.3%). WCU's six-year graduation rate has increased from 47.3% in 2006 to 50.2% in 2011, while WCU's institutional peers average decreased (from 54% to 53%) and UNC's average increased slightly (from 59.1% to 59.4%).

4. A reflection on what the institution has learned as a result of the QEP experience

Western Carolina University's QEP, *Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning*, has fostered alignment among the following: 1) our institutional mission (the plan's central tenets are foundational to WCU's strategic plan; WCU earned the community engagement voluntary classification by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 2008); 2) student recruitment, learning, and institutional marketing (focusing more on engaged, integrated learning and experiential education); 3) faculty recruitment, appointment, and evaluation, (annual faculty evaluations now include scholarship of engagement as an area of performance; faculty position advertisements include reference to engaged teaching, scholarship, and service as expectations, which follow Ernest Boyer's models of scholarship and faculty work⁶); 4) academic departments' and programs' goals; and 5) academic support units' program outcomes (for example, academic tutoring centers, Residential Living, and First Year

⁵ WCU's peer institutions were revised in September 2011 for use in the UNC Performance Funding Model.

⁶ Boyer, E. L. (1991). *Scholarship Reconsidered: priorities of the professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Experiences participate in administrative program reviews, develop program goals and learning outcomes, and assess their unit’s impact on the quality of our student learning environment).

The current review of our QEP indicates that we need to revise one of the learning outcomes. Although programs across Western Carolina University are involved in activities that engage students in their communities and add significantly to the quality of their learning, most of these activities do not meet the civic engagement QEP learning outcome as it was originally defined. The original framing of civic engagement to include “affecting public policy” is not being strictly observed although it was clearly stated in the metarubrics. Instead, departments and programs have defined this learning outcome more liberally in order to serve their own students’ needs. As is illustrated in the Practice Civic Engagement section above, there is less emphasis on affecting public policy and much more focus on being active in or serving the community. Since the response to this goal, based on student self-assessment data, has clearly significantly enriched student experiences, we believe that we should broaden the definition to make this goal even more attainable and better aligned with civic or community engagement as it is understood generally, while maintaining an educational element within its application at WCU.

Implementing our QEP at the unit level rather than in a centralized approach, while time-intensive and somewhat iterative, led to significant commitment and support for the QEP. Academic departments, for example, were 1) initially urged to examine and critique their programs, 2) asked to design optimum curricula, missions and learning outcomes irrespective of the QEP goals and outcomes, and 3) subsequently required to map their programs onto the QEP goals and outcomes. In most cases, the QEP learning outcomes dovetailed well with the independently modified goals and outcomes of the academic programs; the process became a model for fostering faculty support and initiatives related to student learning outcomes and the learning environment. Faculty development and support for integrating QEP outcomes within pedagogical approaches such as in undergraduate research, capstone experiences and experiential learning, was provided by the Coulter Faculty Commons for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through various focused initiatives (e.g., QEP-in-Action, QEP-on-the-Road, and QEP Pathways). Additionally, the more transparent sharing of department-level student learning assessment data that resulted from QEP implementation has helped to inform academic policy and reduce silos that impede students’ ability to view their entire educational experience holistically. Recreational Therapy’s adoption of the QEP at the local level became part of the national framework for teaching, learning, and professional practice within the discipline (see appendix). This exemplifies the power and effectiveness of the QEP’s focus on synthesis.

Appendix

Recreational Therapy Competency Assessment Results Summer 2011 to Spring 2012

| Competency Assessment Areas | RTH 200 | | Pre-Interns | | Post-Interns | | Supervisors | |
|---|---------|------|-------------|------|--------------|------|-------------|------|
| | N | Mean | N | Mean | N | Mean | N | Mean |
| <i>Measured on a 4 point scale: emerging (1), developing (2), achieving (3), exemplary (=4)</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Integrates information from a variety of contexts | 74 | 2.16 | 37 | 3.08 | 37 | 3.50 | 34 | 2.84 |
| Solves complex problems | 74 | 2.23 | 37 | 2.90 | 37 | 3.27 | 34 | 2.52 |
| Communicates effectively and responsibly | 74 | 2.22 | 37 | 3.05 | 37 | 3.49 | 34 | 2.96 |
| Practice civic engagement | 74 | 2.31 | 37 | 2.95 | 37 | 3.60 | 34 | 2.84 |
| Clarify and act on purpose and values | 74 | 2.50 | 37 | 3.18 | 37 | 3.78 | 34 | 3.00 |
| <i>Measured on a 5 point scale from no perceived competence (1) to very high perceived competence (5)</i> | | | | | | | | |
| RT LO* 1: Foundation Knowledge Score | 74 | 2.52 | 37 | 3.37 | 37 | 4.17 | 34 | 3.85 |
| RT LO 2: Client Assessment Knowledge Score | 74 | 2.25 | 37 | 3.28 | 37 | 4.09 | 34 | 3.47 |
| RT LO 2: Planning Treatment Knowledge Score | 74 | 2.24 | 37 | 3.32 | 37 | 4.03 | 34 | 3.65 |
| RT LO 2: Implementing Treatment Knowledge Score | 74 | 2.25 | 37 | 3.25 | 37 | 4.08 | 34 | 3.70 |
| RT LO 3: Evaluation Knowledge Score | 74 | 2.17 | 37 | 3.25 | 37 | 3.96 | 34 | 3.68 |
| RT LO 3: Management Knowledge Score | 74 | 2.20 | 37 | 3.10 | 37 | 3.85 | 34 | 3.42 |

*LO = Learning Outcome