Capturing our Pledge to Academic Quality: The Quality Focus Essay for Accreditation

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The commitment to academic quality is a mindset, a way of thinking. It builds a culture of reflection, innovation, and experimentation. It is about moving from the collection of data to using the findings to try something new. The new accreditation standards call for colleges to identify two to three areas of focus that will lead the institution in further study and examination to improve student learning and achievement. The efforts are to be captured in a Quality Focus Essay (QFE) and built upon actionable plans to improve. In this interactive session, you’ll learn the components of the QFE and the strategies and models to build your own action plans from presenters directly involved in the implementation of the new tool at California community colleges.

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Learning Outcomes

Describe the components of the quality focus essay and compare its relation to the analysis and evaluation of the evidence.

Interpret and apply the recommendations of the Napa Valley team’s experience in writing the quality focus essay with the culture, history and structures at your own institutions.
The New Model and Structure of the Self Evaluation

1. Evidence of Meeting the Standard
2. Analysis and Evaluation
   a. Progress Monitor
   b. Changes Made During and in the Future Based on the Evaluation
   c. Point to the QFE
      - Needed Change
      - Development
      - Expansion
      - Institutionalization
Not Really New
The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation. Each institution seeking reaffirmation of Accreditation is required to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Engaging the wider academic community and addressing one or more issues that contribute to institutional improvement, the plan should be focused, succinct, and limited in length. The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) related to enhancing student learning.

At the culmination of the QEP, the Commission on Colleges sends an on-site committee of professional peers to the campus to assess the educational strengths and weaknesses of the institution. The written report of the committee helps the institution improve its programs, refine its QEP, and also provides the basis on which the Commission decides to grant, continue, reaffirm, or withdraw accreditation.
The AQIP Pathway

The Academic Quality Improvement program (AQIP) is one of several pathways leading to reaffirmation of accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission. Others include the Open and Standard Pathways. AQIP differs from the other pathways in that it is premised on principles of continuous quality improvement, and its various processes and requirements are designed to assist institutions in achieving quality improvement, along with reaffirming the institution’s accredited status with the Commission once every AQIP cycle. Many institutions have reported transforming their quality cultures since embarking on the AQIP Pathway.

Updates to the AQIP Pathway

The Board of Trustees adopted policy changes related to the AQIP Pathway at its meeting on June 12-13, 2014.

View the new Eight-Year Cycle for the AQIP Pathway.

New: Systems Portfolio Structure and AQIP Categories - This document identifies the revised AQIP Categories (now six in number) and the accompanying revised Systems Portfolio structure. The document is also divided along regional lines and institutions can download individual sections.
Engaged Learning Beyond the Classroom
Executive Summary

Southern Methodist University
Quality Enhancement Plan
February 22, 2011

The focus of the SMU Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is on Engaged Learning experiences beyond or outside of the classroom, locally and globally. All SMU undergraduate students will be encouraged to participate in at least one extensive experiential learning activity prior to graduation.
QFE Tip
Source of Information on the QFE
Understanding the Contents

Compare the language in the Guidebook expectations for the QFE with the language in the Manual itself. Where are the similarities? Where does the language appear to vary? Where would you map words from the Manual language to the expectations from the Guide?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guide Contents</th>
<th>Manual Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identification of the Projects:</strong> The projects should be vital to the long-term improvement of student learning and achievement over a multi-year period</td>
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<td><strong>Desired Goals/Outcomes:</strong> The QFE should describe specific, well-defined goals expected to lead to observable results</td>
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<td><strong>Actions/Steps to be Implemented:</strong> The QFE (or an Appendix to the QFE) should provide the steps to be implemented for each project</td>
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<td><strong>Timeline:</strong> The QFE (or Appendix) should include a calendaring of all steps to be implemented</td>
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<td><strong>Responsible Parties:</strong> The QFE should provide clear lines of responsibility for implementation and sustainability</td>
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<td><strong>Resources:</strong> The QFE should include a realistic plan for the resources (human, physical, technology, or financial resources) the institution will need in order to implement and sustain the projects</td>
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<td><strong>Assessment:</strong> The QFE should include the institution’s plan for evaluating the outcomes and effectiveness of the projects</td>
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The New Model and Structure of the Self Evaluation

1. Evidence of Meeting the Standard
2. Analysis and Evaluation
3. Progress Monitor
   - Changes Made During and in the Future Based on the Evaluation
   - Point to the QFE
     - Needed Change Development
     - Expansion
     - Institutionalization
Changes and Plans Arising out of the Self Evaluation Process
During the process of self evaluation, institutions commonly find areas where institutional effectiveness can be improved or changes are needed in order to meet the Commission’s Standards. Both the changes made during the self evaluation process and plans for future action should be included in the institution’s Self Evaluation Report. The plans should also be integrated into the institution’s ongoing evaluation and planning processes for implementation and follow up. The institution should include changes it has made in response to its self evaluation, and of future actions planned. These changes and planned changes demonstrate the necessary linkages between the self evaluation process and institutional planning, decision making, resource allocation, and continuous improvement. The changes made and plans for future action should be placed in the Self Evaluation Report following the relevant grouping of standards (for example, I.A, I.B, I.C, II.A, etc.). The discussion should include any timelines for implementation and expected outcomes. It is suggested that the institution develop a chart summarizing changes made in response to its self evaluation process and future actions planned for ease of institutional tracking and monitoring.
Review of the Essay

From the Guide...

The comprehensive evaluation team and the Commission will review and provide constructive feedback on the QFE, with the goal of supporting institutional efforts to enhance student learning and achievement. At the Midterm, the institution will provide a progress report or, if the projects are completed, a final report on the outcomes of the projects.

From the Manual...

excellence. The areas identified in the Essay will become critical focal points for the institution’s Midterm Report. Evaluation teams and the Commission will comment on the institution’s QFE and may offer constructive advice or assistance.