



Learning for Life: Experience Your Future

Quality Enhancement Plan Northwestern State University of Louisiana

Prepared for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)

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Executive Summary

Learning for Life: Experience Your Future is Northwestern State University's Quality Enhancement Plan. The process for developing the *Learning for Life* QEP began in fall 2014, when the provost asked for a team to consider recent research and practice in order to develop a plan to enhance student learning. Only one proposal advanced during the fall 2015 semester, Experiential Learning, and it included multiple high-impact experiential practices and a "Center" for facilitation of the QEP. Feedback from the President's Leadership Team and campus and community members in spring 2016 led to modifications to the QEP. A change in academic administration delayed its implementation until the summer and fall 2016 semesters.

During this time, the Executive Committee and Task Force teams were formed and the title, logo, goal statement, student learning outcomes (SLOs), and assessments were solidified. Participation in the Annual Conference for the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), September 26-28, 2016, led to incorporating into the QEP the "Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities" (1998). Based on input from students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and community members, solicited in forums in 2016, the Executive Committee initially narrowed its focus to three high-impact practices: Undergraduate Research, Internships, and Performance-Based Events or Projects. In 2017, the QEP was revised to incorporate Study Abroad as a fourth option.

The goal of the *Learning for Life* QEP is preparing students to transfer theory into practice as they transition from University settings to a career or advanced study in graduate or professional schools. Northwestern was founded in 1884 as the State Normal School for teacher preparation. Therefore, this goal supports Northwestern's commitment to teaching and learning and aligns with the University's vision to "become the nation's premier regional university through the innovative delivery of transformative student learning experiences that prepare graduates for life and career success" (*Strategic Plan, 2016-2021, p. 4*). By bridging gaps between theory and application, one of Northwestern's core values – students – remains a priority; experiential education will "assist in the development of an ever-growing individual, scholar, and professional" (p. 5). Further, two key components of Northwestern's mission will be supported by implementing *Learning for Life*: "The creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge" as well as "preparing students to become productive members of society" (p. 4).

A survey distributed in October 2016 to Northwestern department heads and directors revealed that most (92%) degree programs require capstone experiences, followed by internships (40%) and undergraduate research (36%) (**Appendix 5**). However, there is no University-wide plan for defining, monitoring, and/or tracking these activities. *Learning for Life* will provide organization and enhancements to existing experiential learning activities and will add new opportunities for all students in all disciplines. It specifies that faculty in each degree program based on their content and professional expertise will choose at least *one of four selected* high-impact activities; all students in a degree program or concentration



will engage in the same activity; and the experience will occur during the student's junior or senior year, thus a capstone event. The QEP targets at least eight degree programs each year with the goal of 100% integration in all degree programs by 2020.

Several degree programs at Northwestern have a rich history of requiring the three selected high-impact experiential learning opportunities for their students. Seven programs volunteered to pilot the QEP for spring 2017 implementation: Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education (Internship), Health and Exercise Science (Internship), Hospitality Management and Tourism (Internship), Radiologic Science (Internship), Scholars' College (Undergraduate Research), and Music (concentrations include Performance-Based Event or Project and Internship). These programs will collect data as they normally do for program purposes and improvement, but will also align their monitoring instruments to the rubrics created for the assessment of the QEP SLOs.

To measure the effectiveness of the *Learning for Life* Plan, the QEP Task Force created two rubrics that align SLO benchmarks to the NSEE "Principles of Good Practice" (1998) identified as focus areas for Northwestern's QEP. The SLOs and related principles include:

SLO 1— During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines. (Aligned to Principles 1, Intention, and 2, Preparedness and Planning)

SLO 2—During the capstone experiential course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection. (Aligned to Principles 4, Reflection, and 6, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement)

It should be noted that other "best practice" principles have been incorporated into the Plan: Principle 3, Authenticity ("experiences must have a real-world context and/or be useful and meaningful") and Principle 7, Assessment and Evaluation (assessment of SLOs and program/institutional processes based on intentions).

Learning for Life will be a University-wide effort to improve student learning by connecting classroom theoretical knowledge with a real-world experience – Undergraduate Research, Internship, Study Abroad, and Performance-Based Event or Project. This QEP addresses all components of the SACSCOC QEP Review Framework.

II. Process Used to Develop the QEP

In preparing for its 2017 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) reaffirmation process, Northwestern began planning its responses to Core Requirement 2.12 and Comprehensive Standard 3.3.2 by establishing a QEP Steering Committee. During the fall 2014 semester, Dr. Lisa Abney, then Provost and Vice-President of Academic Affairs, asked Curtis Penrod, Assistant Professor and Computer Information Systems

Coordinator, to form a team of faculty to review University data in order to begin identifying potential topics for its new Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). As the QEP focuses on student learning or the environment to support student learning, the Provost deemed it important that the Steering Committee consist of faculty representing the four University colleges: Arts and Sciences, Business and Technology, Education and Human Development, and Nursing and Allied Health. Therefore, Mr. Penrod enlisted the help of the following faculty members and other individuals who support the academic processes:

- Dr. Kathy Autrey – Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics
- Dr. Massimo Bezoari – Professor of Chemistry, Louisiana Scholars' College and then Faculty Senate President
- Candace Churchman – Online graduate student majoring in Curriculum and Instruction
- Dr. Debra Clark – Assistant Professor, College of Nursing
- Dr. Betsy Cochran – Professor of Ecology, Louisiana Scholars' College
- Christopher Gist – Shreveport campus student majoring in Nursing (BSN)
- Dr. Dustin Hebert – Associate Professor, Department of Teaching and Learning
- Steve Hicks – Executive Director, Academic Advising Services and past QEP Director
- Kyla Winey – Natchitoches campus Student Government Association President, majoring in Communications

The Steering Committee met for the first time on December 3, 2014, to understand its purpose and role, which was to identify significant issues based on quantitative and qualitative data to be considered for the QEP topic. Immediately, the discussion involved topics such as strengthening the general studies curriculum, increasing student engagement in learning, and enhancing critical thinking skills, but those initial ideas were set aside so the data could frame the discussion.

During the first meeting, a timeline was set to determine how to best approach solutions to academic challenges and how findings would be presented to the University community. Objectives included a review of current data and the development of a survey to gain more insight about the student learning outcomes of undergraduate academic degree programs. The target to present the recommendations for consideration was the end of March 2015.

There was discussion regarding data needs and how to request such data. Lily Pharris, then director of Institutional Research (IR), said her office could provide fall-to-fall persistence rates, six-year retention and graduation rates for degree-seeking undergraduate students, grade distribution reports, and other information. Veronica Biscoe, Director of University Planning, Assessment, and EEO, stated there were data points available from the Collegiate Learning Assessment, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, and the Graduating Student Survey. The Committee concluded actual

performance data regarding student learning outcomes were needed to determine what academic challenges students were facing; therefore, the Committee decided to survey department heads, directors, and coordinators for this information.

This survey was administered December 13, 2014, through January 19, 2015, and those results were discussed during the second meeting of the Steering Committee, held on January 21, 2015. The review indicated consistent challenges across academic degree programs: communication/writing/speaking, application of skills/content knowledge to “real” world, basic math skills/statistics/mathematical processing, and critical thinking. Committee members indicated they would like to further explore the exact challenge regarding communication and to encourage non-responding departments to complete the survey. Other data points provided by the IR and the Office of Planning, Assessment, and EEO were reviewed, resulting in the identification of significant themes: lower pass rates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes; better performance in face-to-face classes than in online classes; a higher retention/persistence rate for in-classroom students; and academic achievement differences in those students who have remedial requirements.

The February 11, 2015, meeting began by addressing items shared via emails sent between the last and current meetings. The Committee also revisited the timeline. In March, it decided to share findings of potential QEP topics with faculty/staff groups in Alexandria, Leesville, Natchitoches, and Shreveport to seek feedback and the suggestion of any other ideas. After those meetings, the Committee moved to gather responses from all sessions to develop a survey addressing the top five topics for QEP consideration. This survey would be administered to the University community from April 13-26, 2015. Recommendations would be provided to administration during the week of April 27.

The proposed meetings occurred during March 2015. Two sessions (March 3 and March 20) were held in Natchitoches, and approximately 24 individuals attended. For those sessions held in Shreveport (March 16), Alexandria (March 23), and Leesville (March 25), there were 13, 12, and 13 individuals present respectively. As a result of these meetings, leadership, accountability, and professionalism were discussed as possible additional topics.

During the final meeting, March 31, the Steering Committee discussed what would be included in the survey to be administered in April and decided the other potential topics identified during the faculty/staff sessions would not be added for consideration. Additionally, the Committee decided to make a statement regarding the weakness of student learning outcomes generated to date.

Minutes from all meetings can be found in **Appendix 1**.

In April 2015, the survey was sent to 8,890 potential respondents and resulted in a 7% response rate. Of the participants, 51% were students, 27% were faculty, and 22% were staff. The participants ranked the potential topics from one to five, where 36.5% of the respondents ranked communication as the number one topic for consideration. Critical thinking,



Experiential Learning/Real World Application, Legal, Social, and Ethical Considerations, and Quantitative Skills were ranked from two to five. The survey report can be found in **Appendix 2**.

After the survey results were provided to administration, Dr. Abney assisted Dr. Greg Bouck, SACSCOC Compliance Coordinator, by forwarding his June 10, 2015, email regarding a call for proposals to assist in honing the identification of a QEP topic. Dr. Abney used a faculty and staff distribution list to reach all current employees. Included in the email was the QEP Submission Form, which addressed general information regarding the QEP, details of the submission, and the September 15, 2015, deadline (**Appendix 3**). The second attachment was the scoring rubric to be used for submitted proposals (**Appendix 4**). This electronic process provided a path to include all University personnel interested in the QEP.

The only proposal submitted addressed experiential learning. The team who developed the proposal included faculty and staff representing Academic Affairs, The Student Experience, and Alumni Affairs. Team members from all offices involved indicated a shared interest in improving Northwestern students' learning experience, job preparation, and connection with the community before and after graduation. The team met during summer and fall 2015 to develop the proposal into a draft plan. Members of the group were:

- Steven Gruesbeck, Team Leader; Director, Office of Service-Learning and Instructor, Psychology
- Dr. Laura Aaron, Professor, Radiologic Science and Director, School of Allied Health
- Dr. Ali Ahmad, Associate Professor and Department Head, Engineering Technology
- Rebecca Boone, Executive Director, Counseling and Career Services
- Reatha Cox, Executive Director, First Year Experience and Leadership Development
- Vanner Erikson, Associate Director of Alumni Affairs
- Dr. Kimberly McAlister, Associate Professor, Education and Department Head, Teaching, Leadership, and Counseling
- Dr. Begona Perez-Mira, Associate Professor, Computer Information Systems
- Dr. Pamela B. Simmons; Professor and Senior Director, College of Nursing

The objective addressed in the draft QEP was to promote existing experiential experiences (i.e., internship, practicum, service learning, undergraduate research, exhibitions of creative and performing arts, laboratory-based sciences, study abroad) and to create new ones. The plan discussed how this initiative was aligned to the University mission in that high-quality learning opportunities would "prepare students to become productive members of society and promote economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region." In addition, the plan addressed goals of the Academic Excellence focus area of the [*Strategic Plan, 2016-2021*](#) (see Focused Report CR 2.5).

In October 2015, the QEP proposal was shared with the President's Leadership Team, consisting of the University's five vice presidents, four college deans, Chief Technology Officer,

Internal Auditor, Dean of Students, Athletics Director, Faculty Senate President, Institutional Advancement Executive Director, and University Planning and Assessment Director, for their consideration and comments. Feedback received from the President's Leadership Team included these concerns: the cost related to personnel, the number of personnel required to administer the plan, the ability to measure the proposed student learning outcomes (SLOs), and program assessment. The team that developed the QEP proposal heard these concerns and modified the QEP by eliminating two positions and also sought advice from a colleague at another university on revising the SLOs. By December 2015, the President's Leadership Team endorsed the QEP proposal noting it was still a draft and required further revisions based on feedback from the remainder of the University community and other constituents.

A team meeting was held on January 27, 2016, to develop a timeline for moving forward with the QEP process. The timeline included conducting focus group(s), collecting student input, branding and marketing, and an open faculty forum.

Two factors influenced the delay in QEP development from February to May 2016. The first factor was the resignation of Dr. Lisa Abney as Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, which resulted in the reorganization of Academic Affairs with the Chief Academic Officer and the Council of Academic Deans providing leadership. Dr. Steven Horton, Dean of Graduate Studies and Dean of Arts and Sciences, was named Chief Academic Officer. The second factor was the President's intent to decentralize the QEP and name a faculty member with experience in developing and supervising internships as the QEP Director. Because of these factors, the timeline was pushed to the summer and fall semesters.

Effective July 1, 2016, Dr. Steven Horton accepted another position external to the University, and Dr. Vickie Gentry was named Chief Academic Officer. Work on the plan began to move forward again as a QEP director was named—Dr. John Dollar, Professor and Department Head of Health and Human Performance. Members of the QEP Executive Committee were identified by August 2016. The members included the Chief Academic Officer, QEP director, Executive Director of the First-Year Experience, Faculty Senate President, Assistant Vice-President of External Affairs for University Advancement, Student Government Association President, and Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources. These individuals were designated to address all details of the QEP and to continue communication with the University community regarding its status.

Three members of the Executive Committee attended the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) Annual Conference held in San Antonio, Texas, September 26-28, 2016. This opportunity allowed for networking with colleagues to understand how experiential learning activities are addressed on other campuses. Additionally, the members were exposed firsthand to research conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), as well as effective methods of experiential education published by NSEE. These resources laid the foundation for advancing the QEP to the next level. The participants returned to campus and shared their experiences with other Executive Committee members and the President's Leadership Team.

The Executive Committee organized QEP Forums to educate constituents about experiential learning and its value in the educational process. Two faculty forums were hosted on the Natchitoches campus (October 6 and 7) and one in Shreveport (October 14). The first forum was recorded and placed on Northwestern's electronic course platform site (Moodle), and the third forum was broadcast to Alexandria and Fort Polk sites via compressed video. Student forums were held on November 1 and 2. A presentation was made to the Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce on November 2, and the Northwestern Foundation Board and the Northwestern Alumni Association Annual Meeting on October 21. Finally, the President gave a presentation to the Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance (CLEDA), and the Faculty Senate was addressed. The latter events were both held on November 15.

After the faculty forums, the Chief Academic Officer requested department heads to complete a questionnaire asking about high-impact practices currently used in academic program curricula (See Appendix 5). The information provided was intended to provide a road map of professional development necessary for a successful QEP implementation.

The QEP Task Force was named to work on writing the QEP after final comments were gathered from all University constituents. This team was composed of Executive Committee members, plus nine other individuals—seven with faculty status, the Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce President and CEO, and the Director of Counseling and Career Services. The final member was a member of the Team that submitted the only QEP proposal for consideration.

The teams met several times during the fall 2016 semester. In addition to those scheduled meetings, much work was done via email and during supplemental meetings of team members in order to accomplish assigned tasks. Minutes from both team meetings can be found on the [Learning for Life](#) web page. It should be noted that the QEP title, *Learning for Life: Experience your Future*, was selected at the November 10, 2016, Task Force meeting; the logo, designed by the Director of Marketing at Northwestern, was also approved on this date.

On January 9, 2017, University faculty and staff assembled for updates on the SACSCOC Reaffirmation Process and the QEP. Professional development break-out sessions addressing high-impact practices were held to provide additional information about performance-based projects, undergraduate research, internships, open educational resources, and creating rubrics. Presentation information is posted under the QEP Forum and Faculty Development headings on the [Learning for Life](#) web page.

The University submitted the completed QEP to SACSCOC on January 31, 2017, and began the process of implementing it immediately thereafter. On February 22, 2017, Northwestern invited the University community to attend the QEP Launch Party. Pilot Programs had an opportunity to share their experiential learning practices with faculty, students, and members of the community. The event was well-attended. In early March 2017, members of the QEP Task Force and Teams held numerous meetings concerning the QEP with the SACSCOC On-Site Visiting Team. The QEP Task Force made refinements to the QEP based on feedback from students, faculty, staff, University stakeholders, and the SACSCOC On-Site Visiting Team.



These refinements included the following actions: assignment of a full-time QEP Director as well as an Assistant Director with faculty status; population of QEP Grants, Implementation, and Assessment Teams; identification of QEP Program Coordinators; revision of the QEP Timeline and Department Implementation Timeline to condense the implementation calendar; development of QEP faculty grant application form and process; incorporation of a Study Abroad capstone experience; development of a rubric to guide the Implementation Team; development and administration of standardized QEP Pilot assessment instruments; assessment of the QEP Pilot; and revision of the QEP budget to ensure adequate resources are available for personnel, professional development, extra services contracts, travel, supplies, operating expenses, capital outlay, and other expenses. Final revisions to the QEP were completed in July 2017.

III. Identification of the Topic

What sparked Northwestern from its first days—a commitment to teaching and learning as the state’s first normal school for preparing teachers—continues today. Because of this legacy, academic experiences outside the classroom have and continue to be integral to the University’s vision: “Northwestern will become the nation’s premier regional university through the innovative delivery of transformative student learning experiences that prepare graduates for life and career success” *Strategic Plan, 2016-2021* (p. 4). This vision aligns with the University’s highest priority in its Mission Statement, “excellence in teaching” to prepare students “to become productive members of society” (p. 8). Thus, formalizing a University-wide experiential learning program, *Learning for Life: Experience Your Future*, strengthens and supports the University’s mission and vision for preparing students to transition from campus to careers or advanced studies. The Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities (National Society for Experiential Education, 1998) will guide Northwestern’s implementation of its QEP.

Rationale

By adopting *Learning for Life* as the University’s QEP, Northwestern will better ensure all students, regardless of major, have opportunities for hands-on learning or research as they transfer classroom learning and theory into practical application in career or research settings. Changing dynamics in today’s global economy and changing skills and knowledge expected of college graduates require universities to be nimble and ready to adapt curriculum to remain relevant. Experiential learning provides that needed bridge between academia and evolving trends and demands in varied career paths. Importantly, the experiential learning envisioned for *Learning for Life* provides Northwestern students supervised opportunities to practice, demonstrate, and reflect upon newly learned skills and knowledge. Collaboration and mentoring will guide Northwestern’s approach to *Learning for Life* as students develop intellectual, social, and practical competencies in experiential learning settings.

Learning for Life aligns with Northwestern’s mission, vision, core values, goals, and strategic plan (stated below) that collectively have components with a focus on preparing students for the world of work or advanced study. For example, this QEP is essential for the University to achieve its strategic vision of becoming the nation’s “premier regional university”; to make the values of student success, motivation, and enrichment manifest; to provide continued direction toward being responsive to changing workforce trends and promoting economic development; and to accomplish an important tenet of its mission: a “responsive, student-oriented institution.”

Northwestern’s [Strategic Plan, 2016-2021](#) provides the foundation and philosophy guiding the University’s decision to select experiential learning as the focus of its QEP. Our mantra, ‘Dedicated to One Goal – Yours’ is not simply a slogan. Rather, it represents a philosophy, which is that the ‘Student’ is the heartbeat of this University. Our energy and focus are on making each one successful in whatever field he or she chooses to pursue” (p. 4). *Learning for Life* manifests this philosophy.

Mission (adopted 2003; revalidated 2017)

Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution that is committed to the creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching, research, and service. The University maintains as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs. Northwestern prepares its students to become productive members of society and promotes economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region.

Vision (revised in the [Strategic Plan, 2016-2021](#))

Northwestern State University will become the nation’s premier regional university through the innovative delivery of transformative Student learning experiences that prepare graduates for life and career success.

Core Values (revised in the [Strategic Plan, 2016-2021](#))

Our core values capture the guiding principles for how we make decisions and work together. They are the foundation of the type of University community and regional partner we strive to become. Our guiding values are:

- **Our Students are our priority.** We provide each Student with transformational and experiential learning experiences to assist in the development of an ever-growing individual, scholar, and professional.
- **Diversity helps define who we are.** We welcome and respect all traveling on a journey for knowledge. Differences make us stronger.



- **We are future focused.** We do not rest on our laurels, as we are in constant search of individual and organizational improvement. We seek opportunities to improve our Students, community, and region.
- **Innovation is leading the forward edge of change.** We strive to be on the forefront in all we do.
- **We honor and respect the ideals of freedom.** We protect the freedom of all members of our community to seek truth and express their views.
- **We are careful stewards.** We responsibly and sustainably manage the economic and natural resources entrusted to us.
- **Integrity is our cornerstone.** We hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards as educators, scholars, Students, and professionals.
- **We are a team.** We are a collaborative community that focuses on ensuring the success of every member.

Eight Principles of Best Practice

Northwestern subscribes to the tenets of the Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities (1998) espoused by the National Society for Experiential Learning (NSEE):

1. **Intention:** All parties must be clear from the outset why experience is the chosen approach to the learning that is to take place and to the knowledge that will be demonstrated, applied or result from it. Intention represents the purposefulness that enables experience to become knowledge and, as such, is deeper than the goals, objectives, and activities that define the experience.
2. **Preparedness and Planning:** Participants must ensure that they enter the experience with sufficient foundation to support a successful experience. They must also focus from the earliest stages of the experience/program on the identified intentions, adhering to them as goals, objectives and activities are defined. The resulting plan should include those intentions and be referred to on a regular basis by all parties. At the same time, it should be flexible enough to allow for adaptations as the experience unfolds.
3. **Authenticity:** The experience must have a real world context and/or be useful and meaningful in reference to an applied setting or situation. This means that it should be designed in concert with those who will be affected by or use it, or in response to a real situation.
4. **Reflection:** Reflection is the element that transforms simple experience to a learning experience. For knowledge to be discovered and internalized the learner must test assumptions and hypotheses about the outcomes of decisions and actions taken, then weigh the outcomes against past learning and future implications. This reflective process is integral to all phases of experiential learning, from identifying intention



and choosing the experience, to considering preconceptions and observing how they change as the experience unfolds. Reflection is also an essential tool for adjusting the experience and measuring outcomes.

5. **Orientation and Training:** For the full value of the experience to be accessible to both the learner and the learning facilitator(s), and to any involved organizational partners, it is essential that they be prepared with important background information about each other and about the context and environment in which the experience will operate. Once that baseline of knowledge is addressed, ongoing structured development opportunities should also be included to expand the learner's appreciation of the context and skill requirements of her/his work.
6. **Monitoring and Continuous Improvement:** Any learning activity will be dynamic and changing, and the parties involved all bear responsibility for ensuring that the experience, as it is in process, continues to provide the richest learning possible, while affirming the learner. It is important that there be a feedback loop related to learning intentions and quality objectives and that the structure of the experience be sufficiently flexible to permit change in response to what that feedback suggests. While reflection provides input for new hypotheses and knowledge based in documented experience, other strategies for observing progress against intentions and objectives should also be in place. Monitoring and continuous improvement represent the formative evaluation tools.
7. **Assessment and Evaluation:** Outcomes and processes should be systematically documented with regard to initial intentions and quality outcomes. Assessment is a means to develop and refine the specific learning goals and quality objectives identified during the planning stages of the experience, while evaluation provides comprehensive data about the experiential process as a whole and whether it has met the intentions which suggested it.
8. **Acknowledgment:** Recognition of learning and impact occur throughout the experience by way of the reflective and monitoring processes and through reporting, documentation and sharing of accomplishments. All parties to the experience should be included in the recognition of progress and accomplishment. Culminating documentation and celebration of learning and impact help provide closure and sustainability to the experience.

Summary

Learning for Life: Experience Your Future is more than a slogan. It represents the University's legacy in long-time experiential learning, student teaching, and its current commitment to expanding and enhancing hands-on experiences across programs. The QEP will bridge gaps between classroom theory and application; prompt students to reflect on their learning; expand teaching and learning practices; allow the University to serve better its students and stakeholders; enhance strategic initiatives; support the University's mission, vision, values, and goals; and, most importantly, improve student readiness for a chosen career or



advanced study. In sum, the QEP is a visible, tangible, and active vehicle for Northwestern to demonstrate its commitment to innovative teaching and learning practices for student success.

IV. Desired Student Learning Outcomes

Northwestern adopted two Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for *Learning for Life* that directly relate to the four targeted high-impact educational practices: Undergraduate Research, Internships, Performance-Based Events or Projects, and Study Abroad.

SLO 1—During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines. (Aligned with Principle 1-Intention and Principle 2-Preparedness and Planning)

SLO 2—During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection. (Aligned with Principle 4-Reflection and Principle 6-Monitoring and Continuous Improvement)

These two outcomes support the University's mission to prepare students "to become productive members of society and promote economic development," and they support the stated commitment "to the creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge." The outcomes also support a tenet of the University's vision to provide transformative learning by engaging students in innovative and meaningful experiences, support a core value of enriching their educational experiences, and support stated goals for individual student career, social, and civic success, and collaborating to create an environment of excellence.

Although the two SLOs are aligned with specific Principles of Good Practice, the overall *Learning for Life* plan acknowledges and incorporates all eight practices from **Intention** that defines the experience to the final **Acknowledgment** that documents reflection, progress, and accomplishment. The SLOs support the primary goal for *Learning for Life*: "preparing students to transfer theory into practice as they transition from University settings to a career or advanced study in graduate schools or professional schools."

As noted in Section V: Literature Review and Best Practices, essential learning outcomes for student success in meeting future challenges may be accomplished with reflection in experiential learning opportunities. Although other related learning outcomes are associated with experiential learning, such as critical thinking and problem solving, Northwestern chose to focus on the following principles of best practice: 1-Intention, 2-Preparedness and Planning, 4-Reflection, and 6-Monitoring and Continuous Improvement. Each principle is supported by a set of benchmarks that define the learning outcome and by a rubric-based assessment process. Authenticity (Principle 3) and Assessment and Evaluation (Principle 7) are also expectations of the Enhancement Plan.



SLO 1—During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines.

Benchmarks: Students will

- Correlate prior life experiences with academic knowledge and experiences. (Principle 2)
- Connect concepts through an interdisciplinary perspective. (Principle 1)
- Adapt and implement previously learned knowledge and skills to new contexts, situations, or scenarios. (Principle 6)
- Communicate effectively. (Principles 2 and 6)
- Expand sense of future self through reflection on participation in experiential learning process. (Principle 4)
- Demonstrate professional characteristics and behaviors. (Principles 2 and 6)

SLO 2—During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection.

Benchmarks: Students will

- Communicate effectively using appropriate conventions of language and correct format(s). (Principles 2 and 6)
- Connect prior learning to changes that are a direct result of the experiential learning process. (Principle 4)
- Revisit prior learning to apply knowledge and skills in new and innovative ways. (Principles 4 and 6)
- Assess what they have learned about themselves as members of a broader community. (Principle 7)
- Assess what they have learned about themselves as individuals. (Principle 7)

An assessment and evaluation plan for *Learning for Life* is detailed in Chapter X: Assessment.

V. Literature Review & Best Practices

Learning begins with student engagement, which in turn leads to knowledge and understanding. Once someone understands, he or she becomes capable of performance or action. Critical reflection on one's practice and understanding leads to higher order thinking in the form of a capacity to exercise judgment in the face of uncertainty and to create designs in the presence of uncertainty and unpredictability. (Shulman, 2002, p. 38).

Introduction

The primary goal for Northwestern's *Learning for Life* is preparing students to transfer theory into practice as they transition from University settings to a career or advanced study in



graduate schools or professional schools. To realize this goal, the University adopted two Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

SLO 1—During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines.

SLO 2—During the capstone experiential course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection.

The above goal and its associated SLOs are supported by experiential learning research and reflect current “best practice” as espoused by the National Society of Experiential Education (1998). As an example, both SLOs must occur in a real-world setting and/or be meaningful or useful to the setting or situation (Principle 3: Authenticity). Additionally, both SLOs must be documented and assessed in a meaningful way with regard to initial intentions and quality outcomes (Principle 7: Assessment and Evaluation). SLO 1 is also aligned to Principles 1, Intention, and 2, Preparedness and Planning, whereas SLO 2 best addresses Principles 4, Reflection, and 6, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement.

Literature Review

Experiential learning has long been a staple of some college programs, such as teacher education; however, research supports that all students, regardless of major, benefit. As Eylar (2009) states in the article “The Power of Experiential Education”:

Experiential education has value far beyond building the kind of social skills, work ethic, and practical expertise that are important in professionally oriented programs. In fact, experiential education can also lead to more powerful academic learning and help students achieve intellectual goals commonly associated with liberal education, including

- a deeper understanding of subject matter than is possible through classroom study alone;
- the capacity for critical thinking and application of knowledge in complex or ambiguous situations;
- the ability to engage in lifelong learning, including learning in the workplace.

Experiential education also identifies the practices necessary for achieving these outcomes, particularly the use of structured reflection to help students link experience with theory and, thereby, deepen their understanding and ability to use what they know.

Shulman (2002) asserts learning is not solely an intellectual endeavor, stating: “We foster the transformation of thought into action, but we also strive to educate for delay, self-criticism, and reflection” (p. 43). At its core, experiential learning in its many forms requires student engagement to connect theory and practice. “Practice may be the crucible in which



understanding is tested, or in which commitment is affirmed” (p. 41). Shulman describes a trajectory in which students move from understanding to action to reflection to judgment and to commitment. Importantly, reflection leads to higher-order thinking skills that allow for judgment in the face of uncertainty or unpredictability. Judgment can then lead to student commitment of the “norms, values, and conventions” of their particular professions (p. 39).

To boost student engagement, AAC&U commissioned the 2005 report, *Liberal Education and America’s Promise* (LEAP) (Schneider, 2005). This report identified high-impact practices, including undergraduate research, internships, and capstone or performance-based experiences, to help reform undergraduate education. The 2016 NSSE *Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education* states: “High-impacts practices (HIPs) represent enriching educational experiences that can be life-changing. They typically demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and other students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback” (p. 15).

When students participate in these high-impact practices, Kuh (2010) posits that these practices can induce six student behaviors:

1. investing time and effort
2. interacting with faculty and peers about substantive matters
3. experiencing diversity
4. responding to more frequent feedback
5. reflecting and integrating learning
6. discovering relevance of learning through real-world applications

AAC&U 2010 report *Five High-Impact Practices* (Brownell & Swaner, 2010)

Kuh also asserts that “stitching together two or more high-impact practices” can boost student engagement and “yield compensatory benefits to students who need the most help, such as those from historically underrepresented groups and those who are less well-prepared for college” (p. 8).

For students to succeed and prepare for 21st-century challenges, the 2005 LEAP initiative identified “Essential Learning Outcomes”:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

Personal and Social Responsibility, Including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Integrative and Applied Learning, Including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

The experiential learning cycle developed by Kolb (1984) provides the foundation to understanding how students can achieve these outcomes. The cycle begins with a concrete experience, which is the basis for observation and reflection. The learner then reflects on the experience, assimilating and distilling concepts upon which to draw conclusions; finally, ideas and conclusions are tested in active experimentation, which “can serve as guides in creating new experiences” (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999). A four-stage model of Kolb’s learning cycle is available on the Simply Psychology [website](#) (McLeod, 2013).

In 1998, the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) articulated its Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities. These principles are intention, preparedness and planning, authenticity, reflection, orientation and training, monitoring and continuous improvement, assessment and evaluation, and acknowledgement.

Regardless of the experiential activity, both the learner and the facilitator of learning have a “mutual responsibility.” Nonetheless, NSEE prefaces the eight principles by noting that the facilitator of the learning is expected to take the lead “in ensuring both the quality of the learning experience and of the work produced, and in supporting the learner to use the principles, which underlie the pedagogy of experiential education.”



Throughout the literature, reflection is a key component for a quality learning experience. Paulo Freire (1970) suggested that educational praxis should combine both action and reflection as part of the educative process. Eyler (2009) describes “the inclusion of opportunities for feedback and reflection” as the “most critical factor,” which should be embedded in the experience from start to finish (p. 30).

Ash and Clayton (2004) describe three general phases for a rigorous reflection framework that “maximizes learning and helps to refine reflective skills” (p. 140). These general phases are 1) description (objectively) of an experience, 2) analysis in accordance with relevant categories of learning, and 3) articulation of learning outcomes. In sum, these phases constitute an articulated learning (AL) phase, which brings “each reflection activity to a close and establishes a foundation for learners to carry the results of the reflection process forward beyond the immediate experience, improving the quality of future learning and of future experience” (p. 142). They recommend AL be guided by four guiding questions:

1. What did I learn?
2. How, specifically, did I learn it?
3. Why does this learning matter, or why is it significant?
4. In what ways will I use this learning; or what goals shall I set in accordance with what I have learned in order to improve myself, the quality of my learning, or the quality of my future experiences or service?

Jay and Johnson (2002) describe reflection as a process involving experience and uncertainty. The learner must identify questions and key elements of a matter that have emerged as significant and then compose thoughts into dialogue with oneself and others (p. 75).

Based on the cited research and best practices, Northwestern has focused *Learning for Life* on four “capstone” high-impact practices: undergraduate research, internships, study abroad, and performance-based events or projects. All provide experiential learning opportunities for students, regardless of major or whether they are enrolled in a campus or distance learning setting. Additionally, all require curricula that scaffold classroom learning and out-of-classroom experiences to prepare students for a culminating experience that makes *Learning for Life: Experience your Future* a reality.

Undergraduate Research

As noted by the AAC&U in its 2010 report on *Five High-Impact Practices* (Brownell & Swaner, 2010), undergraduate research had its inception in the sciences. However, research as a scholarly enterprise has been increasingly expanded across disciplines to engage students. The report cites Kinkead (2003) for expanding the definition of research to include creative activity and scholarship along with traditional scientific inquiry (p. 32). Further, the report underscores earlier findings by the Boyer Commission (1998) that undergraduate research

differs substantially from traditional teaching. As opposed to the traditional transmission of information from faculty to students, research requires faculty to mentor students in co-creating knowledge.

Key findings supporting undergraduate research cited by the AAC&U report include the following:

1. Improved writing and communication skills, increased frequency and quality of interactions with faculty and peers, improved critical-thinking and problem-solving skills (Hu, Scheuch, Schwartz, Gayles, & Li, 2008).
2. Gains in intellectual curiosity and time-management skills (Bauer & Bennett, 2003).
3. Improved reading comprehension, working collaboratively, and information retrieval; clarified career goals and graduate school goals; and learning to work independently and take responsibility for learning (Seymour et al. 2004).
4. Understanding professional behavior and how professionals work on a problem (Lopatto, 2010).
5. Positive effect on minority students' persistence, retention, and graduate school enrollment (Hu et al., 2008)
6. Positive effects on self-esteem, coping strategies, and expectations about academic performance (Jonides, 1995).
7. For any of the above positive benefits to occur from undergraduate research, faculty mentoring is a key moderating variable and central to the undergraduate research experience (Elgren & Hensel, 2006).

Internships

A preferred experiential learning opportunity is an internship, which allows students to work in a "real-world" setting. Just as undergraduate research can take varied forms across disciplines, so can internships. O'Neill (2010) posited that the benefits include helping students build early professional experiences, discover whether a profession is right for them, apply classroom learning to professional settings, and build professional networks.

Increasingly, internships have become a conduit for students to enter the world of work following graduation. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in 2015 reported that 62.8% of undergraduate students participated in an internship, the highest number reported since 2007. Employers reported preferring hiring graduates with work experience, with 60% of employers preferring work experience through an internship. To clarify what constitutes an internship, NACE provided a definition:

An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable

applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.

According to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2015), the primary mission of internship programs is to engage students in planned, educationally related work and learning experiences that integrate knowledge and theory with practical application and skill development in a professional setting.

Internships should incorporate effective educational practices as described by Kuh (2007) in his *Director's Message for the NSSE 2007 Annual Report*:

1. They require considerable time and effort for purposeful tasks.
2. Students must interact with others and develop a meaningful relationship with at least another person (mentor, supervisor, faculty, peer).
3. The experience increases the likelihood of experiencing diversity by interactions with people different from the student.
4. Students receive frequent feedback.
5. Students can test their academic learning in unfamiliar settings.
6. Students come to better understand themselves in relation to others and acquire the intellectual tools and ethical grounding to act with confidence.

When effectively structured and implemented, the internship is important to three entities: the student intern, the university program, and the internship site (Foster & Dollar, 2010). In this win-win-win situation, the student benefits with the opportunity to synthesize learned skills and abilities from the classroom. The student intern also has the opportunity to provide the site supervisor with saleable skill sets and abilities, and, in some cases, cutting-edge knowledge, that can result in a job offer to launch a career. The university program benefits from having a well-educated ambassador represent the institution and endear constituents and stakeholders to the education brand. The university also benefits through internship site supervisors' feedback related to students' academic preparation. Last, internships benefit the internship sites, with increased workload, reduced payload, new cutting-edge knowledge and skill sets, and provide a fresh and new outlook for the organizational products. Interns also offer the supervisor the opportunity to combat worker attrition. An internship helps an employer evaluate how an individual would fare in the actual workplace.

According to Foster and Dollar (2010), an internship as a capstone product of the curriculum is important to students for two key reasons: First, the student has completed the coursework for the degree and is readily available to take a job offer from the internship site. Second, if a job is not offered, the student now has work experience, which can help secure employment elsewhere.



Performance-Based Events or Projects

Whether called “senior capstones” or another name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project that integrates and applies what they have learned. NSSE has reported that such capstone experiences are offered in departmental programs as well as in general education or university core curricula. Identified by NSSE as “high impact,” the culminating experience or project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of “best work,” or an exhibit of artwork (http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/high_impact_practices.cfm).

In its 2010 report *Five High-Impact Practices*, AAC&U noted that these capstone experiences became popular in higher education in the 1990s. Since then, research has varied on how to define a capstone experience and on which learning is the focus: the student’s academic major, general education, or an integration of both. The report cites the Henscheid (2000) study of 707 institutions. Of these, 70.3% of capstone experiences were discipline- or department-based and 16.3% were interdisciplinary. The remainder were transition courses such as preparing for work or graduate school or career planning. However, the most common goal listed by study participants was to “foster integration and synthesis within the academic major” (p. 38).

The *NSSE 2007 National Survey* reported that students’ self-report data indicated participation in a capstone experience such as a final product or performance had multiple desired outcomes: investment of time, relationship with the faculty member (frequent meetings and feedback), and collaboration with peers. In its 2009 survey, NSSE found that one-third of senior respondents reported engaging in a senior capstone experience (p. 39). Although such capstone experiences vary, the AAC&U report stated: “The capstone itself provides the opportunity for students to present their work, though the audience may vary” (p. 39).

Note: Northwestern chose the title “Performance-Based Events or Projects” rather than “Capstone Experiences.” All four high-impact practices chosen for Northwestern’s *Learning for Life* occur as capstone experiences. Northwestern’s definition for a performance-based event or project includes a discipline- or department-based project, exhibit, artistic show, or performance.

Study Abroad

Study abroad provides an opportunity for students and faculty to develop meaningful international experiences relevant to their fields of study. Recent scholarship on education and employment demonstrates the increasing relevance of such experiences in a globalized economy and culture.

Study abroad experiences vary dramatically in purpose, length, and institutional support/control. According to the 2016 Open Doors report, published annually by the Institute for International Education (IIE), 63% of students participating in study abroad were part of



a short-term experience (summer or eight weeks or less); 34% were part of a mid-length experience (one semester, or one or two quarters); and 3% were part of a long-term experience (academic or calendar year) (2016 “Fast Facts”). Students studying abroad represent the full spectrum of academic disciplines, including STEM (24%), business (20%), social sciences (17%), foreign languages and international studies (8%), and fine and applied Arts (7%) (2016 “Fields of Study”).

Recent scholarship on global employment patterns demonstrates that employers value international education, especially when students frame the experiences in terms of personal and professional development. International employment research firm Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) administers an annual employer survey to more than 10,000 employers in 116 countries. According to a 2011 study (Molony, 2011) conducted by QS, 60% of respondents replied affirmatively to the item: “Do you actively seek or attribute value to an international study experience when recruiting?” A majority of American employers (56%) provided an affirmative response, and majorities in Spain (89%), Switzerland (87%), Germany (84%), Egypt (82%), and France (80%) were even greater.

In a study (Gardner, 2009) conducted for the Collegiate Employment Research Institute (CERI) at Michigan State University, Philip Gardner, Inge Steglitz, and Linda Gross determined that American students and potential employers often speak different languages regarding study abroad experiences. Employers participating in the study’s focus groups offered only modest endorsement (20-25%) of study abroad, but they identified four workplace competencies addressed by international education: “Interacting with people who hold different interests, values, or perspectives”; “Understanding cultural differences in the workplace”; “Adapting to situations of change”; and “Gaining new knowledge from experiences.” The authors determined that reflection and “unpacking” were critical for connecting study abroad experiences to employer expectations: “The onus, therefore, is on students to translate study abroad into a framework recognizable to employers and to draw the connection between study abroad and the world of work.” Professionals at CERI developed a number of accessible tools to facilitate this process.

Much like undergraduate research, internship, and performance-based projects, successful study abroad experiences depend upon intentionality, reflection, and the identification of appropriate student learning outcomes. This is particularly important for the most common duration of study abroad experiences: short-term programs that last two to eight weeks. Research through the Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE) program has demonstrated that well-designed short-term programs provide “global engagement” experiences comparable to those of long-term programs. According to R. Michael Paige and Gerald Fry (2009), “the duration and the destination of study abroad programs are not meaningfully associated with participants’ global engagement in various dimensions” (p. 70). “What really counts,” they concluded, “is not how long you stay or where you go, but the quality of the program and the nature of deep cultural and learning experiences provided (p. 13).”



Laura Donnelly-Smith (2009) contends that short-term programs provide critical opportunities for students of modest means to participate in international education, formerly the domain of long-term programs and (primarily) wealthy beneficiaries. "Institutions," Donnelly-Smith asserts, "must continue to develop programs that are appealing and accessible to a broad range of students, including those who have traditionally been overlooked by study abroad offices." Building on the work of Sarah Spencer and Lisa Chieffo, Donnelly-Smith identified five best practices for short-term study-abroad experiences: "Start with strong, clear academic content"; "Make certain faculty are comfortable and competent with experiential teaching"; "Ensure integration with the local community"; "Bring in lecturers from the host country"; and "Require ongoing reflection for both individual students and the group as a whole."

The incorporation of study abroad as a component of the six-hour capstone requirement provides for a flexible QEP with enticing opportunities to link international education to existing coursework as well as internship, research, or performance-based projects and experiences. This is particularly valuable in a rural setting with relatively limited and highly competitive access to such opportunities.

Conclusion

The National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE) stated in its 1986 sourcebook *Strengthening Experiential Education within Your Institution* (Kendall, 1986) that the fundamental purpose is "learning activities that engage the learner directly in the phenomena being studied" (p. 1). Such learning benefits students, institutions, businesses, and communities. The sourcebook emphasized the need for experiential education to be integrated into curriculum and an institution's "system of values and the regular way that faculty teach" (p. 3). Among its many benefits are the following:

- Experiential learning is complete learning when students can master theory and practice (p. 9).
- Because experiential learning is student-centered, students are more motivated when actively engaged (p. 9).
- Students develop multiple competencies such as affective knowledge (being sensitive to others), reflection (gathering and organizing information), and behavior (setting goals, making decisions) (p.10).

In the 30 years since NSIEE published its sourcebook, experiential learning remains critical to student and institutional success by providing opportunities for intellectual maturity and preparation to transition from campus to the world of work or graduate study. These opportunities can be varied but require the careful guidance of faculty.

VI. Actions to be Implemented

Marketing

The marketing of *Learning for Life* will target students, faculty, and staff, as well as the Natchitoches community and its service region. The initial focus will be to develop awareness, and the ultimate goal is aligning the academic programs of the institution to the QEP.

Multiple modes of communication will be vital for marketing *Learning for Life*, including the University's website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, digital signage, Moodle, and a dedicated QEP website. This website provides all stakeholders with detailed information about the QEP, the monitoring of its progress, and recognition of student and faculty accomplishments.

Other marketing activities to supplement the above electronic communications include:

QEP Launch Party – Wednesday, February 22, 2017:

- The QEP Launch Party took place from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm in the Friedman Student Union Ballroom and Lobby. Students, faculty, staff, and external stakeholders attended this open house.
- The Launch Party was shortly before the Mardi Gras break and took advantage of the celebratory nature of the season.
- Food and activities were provided to generate interest and enthusiasm about the QEP.
- Pilot programs were given the opportunity to market experiential learning opportunities in their respective programs.

Initial Marketing Campaign:

- The rollout for *Learning for Life* logo began with the faculty in January 2017.
- Informative posters were strategically placed in University classrooms and other high visibility areas in February of 2017.
- Coinciding with the Launch Party, the campus launched an advertising blitz including logo signage, large floor decals, infographic posters, and table tents. Special emphasis was given to high traffic areas of the Student Union, the Student Services Center, Watson Library, and Iberville Cafeteria.
- Promotional images appeared on campus-wide digital signage within weeks of the Launch Party, including Moodle, MyNSU, and the University website.

Ongoing Marketing Campaign:

- Outdoor signage will be displayed to recognize each program transitioning to the *Learning for Life* initiative over the course of the QEP implementation process.



- University materials will incorporate the *Learning for Life* logo as appropriate.
- Freshman Connection will incorporate video marketing of the *Learning for Life* plan, and the Freshman Connection viewbook distributed to all incoming freshmen and parents will include full-page advertising.
- Backgrounds and screensavers in all University computer labs and classrooms will display the *Learning for Life* promotional images.
- Students participating in experiential learning activities will be spotlighted in videos posted on the University website, the QEP website, VIMEO, and the University YouTube channel. Facebook and Twitter posts will direct viewers to these videos.
- The NSU News Bureau will provide press releases as appropriate to inform the public of student, faculty, and program participation and accomplishments.

Learning for Life will become a major component of the Northwestern experience, from initial contact with high school students through freshman orientation to graduation and beyond. The Office of University Recruiting, the Office of First Year Experience and Leadership Development, and the Director of QEP will be responsible for introducing potential students, current students, and faculty to this endeavor.

Implementation

The faculty and staff of the University have chosen experiential learning to satisfy the 2016 QEP, *Learning for Life*. Northwestern chose to adopt four best practices: internships, undergraduate research, study abroad, and performance-based events or projects. This selection was based on recommendations by QEP evaluators and research by the AAC&U (Adams, 2014), which found that employers (n=400) indicated greater likelihood of selecting employees with three applied learning experiences: internship (94%), senior class thesis/research projects (87%), and collaborative research projects (80%).

In the fall of 2016, the QEP Executive Committee and Task Force gathered information and assembled teams to initiate the *Learning for Life* QEP. Northwestern faculty, staff and students spent two years developing a unified learning plan that would connect the classroom to real-world learning experiences. Through the implementation and application of Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities (NSEE, 1998), *Learning for Life* seeks to enhance experiential learning opportunities for all University academic programs.

Between 2016 and 2020, every academic department at Northwestern will implement at least one experiential learning practice for measurement. The University intends this curriculum to facilitate the transition to a successful career or further study in graduate or professional school. In collaboration with the Northwestern State University Foundation and Alumni Association, the University will measure the long-term impact of these efforts by gathering data on career attainment and professional study of graduates.



Beginning in spring of 2017, seven academic units have been identified as the pilot group for implementation. These units were selected because they have already adopted one of the three experiential learning practices:

1. **Early Childhood Education** and **2. Elementary Education.** Students must complete two semesters of internship to satisfy degree requirements.
3. **Radiologic Sciences.** Students must complete in-clinic practice to satisfy degree requirements.
4. **Hospitality Management and Tourism.** Students must complete internships in hospitality and tourism to satisfy degree requirements.
5. **Health and Exercise Science.** Students must complete internships in the health and fitness industry to satisfy degree requirements.
6. **Music.** Students must prepare and deliver a senior recital or complete internship to satisfy degree requirements.
7. **Louisiana Scholars' College.** Students must complete undergraduate research projects (theses) to satisfy degree requirements.

These seven academic units will provide guidance to the implementation team and serve as models for other programs preparing to implement the QEP. The pilot programs will also have opportunities to refine experiential learning practices based on data from students, faculty, department heads and program coordinators, site supervisors, and graduates.

Throughout the implementation process, the QEP Director will lead faculty professional development activities and meet with program coordinators and department heads to address initial challenges and difficulties. The QEP Director will also meet with faculty to facilitate discussion and selection of the QEP best practice for their area.

These meetings will address possible changes to program curricula, including the apportionment of a minimum of six credit hours for experiential learning activities. Implementation of the QEP will not increase the total credit hours required for each degree; rather, current program curricula should be reviewed and refined by faculty to include at least one of the four designated experiential learning practices. This review will include discussion of required contact hours for each experience. For example, a 12-credit hour internship might require a 15-week time commitment of 35 hours per week, providing nearly 550 contact hours for the intern. The undergraduate research project and the performance-based event or project will each have credentials that align with employment opportunities or expectations for graduate or professional school. Study abroad experiences will have credentials that maintain standard contact hour expectations and that align with best practices for long- and short-term study abroad programs, as defined above. For the purpose of the QEP, each program or concentration (under certain circumstances) must choose at least one of the four designated best practices, and all graduates in the program or concentration must participate in the same experience during the junior or senior year. Once program

faculty vote to adopt an experiential learning best practice, a program faculty representative will be selected. This representative may apply for a faculty grant (stipend or course release) to facilitate development of a formal proposal for aligning program curricula to the QEP. A copy of this grant application is included in the appendices.

As described in the timeline, pilot programs will begin implementing the QEP in spring 2017. Additionally, eight (or nine) new programs will be identified through the application and selection process for implementation in fall 2018. Likewise, eight (or nine) new programs will be identified for implementation in each subsequent year until all undergraduate degree programs are participating in the QEP. The University will leverage its relationships with numerous professional bodies, including the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) and the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), to facilitate the implementation of the QEP.

Summary

To ensure that Northwestern's *Learning for Life* QEP has maximum effectiveness, several stipulations have been identified. The QEP includes four best practice experiential learning opportunities: undergraduate research, internships, study abroad, and performance-based events or projects. The selection of experiential learning activities is the responsibility of academic program faculty in consultation with the QEP Director. Seven pilot programs will initiate implementation in spring 2017, followed by eight or nine additional programs each subsequent year. The *Learning for Life* QEP targets 100% participation by all academic degree programs to include, or be in the process of developing, experiential learning activities by 2020.

VII. Timeline

The development and implementation of the *Learning for Life* QEP is a seven-year process. As illustrated in the table below, this includes two years (2014-16) of data-gathering and proposal development and five years (2016-20) of implementation. The timeline includes information relative to all stages of QEP development and implementation: committee and personnel assignments; faculty and student forums; community engagement and marketing; QEP editing and submission; curricular redesign and approval; and academic program assessment.

Embedded in this timeline is an annual cycle of curricular redevelopment and alignment to the principles of the *Learning for Life* QEP. This cycle includes seven stages.

- (1) Each spring, faculty representing academic programs aligning their curriculum to the QEP will submit applications demonstrating program readiness. These applications will be due each year on May 31.
- (2) The Faculty Grants Team will review these applications to ensure that departmental support and faculty responsibility are adequate. The Faculty Grants Team will award



funding (or course release) to successful applicants by June 30, with funding allocated for the following fall semester.

- (3) During the fall semester, grant recipients will develop a formal proposal for realigning program curricula. These proposals will be submitted to the Implementation Team by November 1.
- (4) The Implementation Team will review proposals to ensure program curricula meet the requirements of the *Learning for Life* QEP and its two student learning outcomes.
- (5) Once approved by the Implementation Team, program coordinators and department heads will submit proposed curricular changes to the University's Curriculum Review Council (CRC), which reviews all proposed changes to course offerings, curricula, and catalog entries and makes recommendations to the University President for approval. All proposals must be submitted to the CRC by January 31 to be included on the agenda for the February meeting, the final meeting of the CRC each academic year.
- (6) Following approval by the CRC, program faculty may begin aligning coursework and course materials to the student learning outcomes of the QEP. (7) The Assessment team will complete direct assessment of *Learning for Life* SLOs at the end of each semester and share findings with program faculty.



Prior to Year 1 2014-16		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gather data for assessment of student academic needs• Distribute student success critical needs surveys to University faculty• Request faculty-driven QEP proposals• Select QEP proposal focused on experiential learning
Year 1 2016-17	Fall 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish Executive Committee to oversee QEP development and coordinate with academic departments and stakeholders• Select director for experiential learning QEP program• QEP leaders attend annual meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education• Faculty forums on QEP & experiential learning• Student forums on QEP & experiential learning• Deliver experiential learning survey to all undergraduate students• QEP presentation to Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce• QEP presentation to Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance• Establish QEP Task Force to engage in writing the QEP• Develop logo and initial marketing for <i>Learning for Life</i> QEP• Develop common rubrics for <i>Learning for Life</i> student learning outcomes• Identify team members for proposal, implementation, and assessment teams• Develop process for proposal, implementation, and assessment of experiential learning endeavors• Develop budget for <i>Learning for Life</i> QEP



Spring 2017

- Begin marketing *Learning for Life* experiential learning programs to current and prospective students, faculty, and University stakeholders
- Host “Learning for Life” kick-off activities for students, faculty, and University stakeholders
- Faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester
- Submit *Learning for Life* QEP to SACSCOC, January 2017
- SACSCOC onsite review, March 2017
- Finalize proposal and review criteria for experiential learning endeavors
- Align coursework for pilot programs with existing experiential learning practices to *Learning for Life* SLOs and rubrics
- Direct assessment of *Learning for Life* SLOs for pilot programs with existing experiential learning practices
- Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)
- Submit applications for faculty grants by May 31

Summer 2017

- Prepare *Learning for Life* annual report
- Award faculty grants by June 30
- Request for Proposals (RFP) for programs aligning curriculum to meet the requirements of *Learning for Life*
- Hire University Assessment Coordinator



Year 2 2017-18	Fall 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester• Continue to market <i>Learning for Life</i> experiential learning activities• QEP leaders attend annual meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education• Programs aligning curriculum to meet <i>Learning for Life</i> requirements submit proposals by November 1• <i>Learning for Life</i> Implementation Team reviews all submitted curriculum alignment proposals by December 1• Programs address concerns of Implementation Team (if applicable) by December 15• Direct assessment of <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs for pilot programs with existing experiential learning practices• Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)
	Spring 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester• Programs submit approved proposals to CRC by January 31• University's Curriculum Review Council reviews all proposed curricular changes at its February meeting• Programs with approved <i>Learning for Life</i> curricular changes align coursework to <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs and rubric• Direct assessment of <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs for pilot programs with existing experiential learning practices• Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)• Submit applications for faculty grants by May 31
	Summer 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare <i>Learning for Life</i> annual report• Award faculty grants by June 30• RFP for programs aligning curriculum to meet the requirements of <i>Learning for Life</i>



Year 3 2018-19	Fall 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program curricular changes take effect (1/3)• Continue faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester• Continue to market <i>Learning for Life</i> experiential learning activities• QEP leaders attend annual meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education• Programs aligning curriculum to meet <i>Learning for Life</i> requirements submit proposals by November 1• <i>Learning for Life</i> Implementation Team reviews all submitted curriculum alignment proposals by December 1• Programs address concerns of Implementation Team (if applicable) by December 15• Direct assessment of <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs for programs with experiential learning practices• Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)
	Spring 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester• Programs submit approved proposals to CRC by January 31• University's Curriculum Review Council reviews all proposed curricular changes at its February meeting• Programs with approved <i>Learning for Life</i> curricular changes align coursework to <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs and rubric• Direct assessment of <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs for programs with experiential learning practices• Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)• Submit applications for faculty grants by May 31
	Summer 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare <i>Learning for Life</i> annual report• Award faculty grants by June 30• RFP for programs aligning curriculum to meet the requirements of <i>Learning for Life</i>



Year 4 2019-20	Fall 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program curricular changes take effect (2/3)• Continue faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester• Continue to market <i>Learning for Life</i> experiential learning activities• QEP leaders attend annual meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education• Programs aligning curriculum to meet <i>Learning for Life</i> requirements submit proposals by November 1• <i>Learning for Life</i> Implementation Team reviews all submitted curriculum alignment proposals by December 1• Programs address concerns of Implementation Team (if applicable) by December 15• Direct assessment of <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs for programs with experiential learning practices• Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)
	Spring 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester• Programs submit approved proposals to CRC by January 31• University's Curriculum Review Council reviews all proposed curricular changes at its February meeting• Programs with approved <i>Learning for Life</i> curricular changes align coursework to <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs and rubric• Direct assessment of <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs for programs with experiential learning practices• Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)• Submit applications for faculty grants by May 31
	Summer 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare <i>Learning for Life</i> annual report• Award faculty grants by June 30• RFP for programs aligning curriculum to meet the requirements of <i>Learning for Life</i>



Year 5 2020-21	Fall 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program curricular changes take effect (3/3) • Continue faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester • Continue to market <i>Learning for Life</i> experiential learning activities • QEP leaders attend annual meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education • Direct assessment of <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs for programs with experiential learning practices • Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)
	Spring 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue faculty professional development on experiential learning throughout semester • Direct assessment of <i>Learning for Life</i> SLOs for programs with experiential learning practices • Indirect assessment of relevant survey and placement data (Graduating Student Survey, Job Placement, Employer Survey, Alumni Survey)
	Summer 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare <i>Learning for Life</i> Impact Report

VIII. Organizational Structure

The QEP organizational structure illustrates the roles and responsibilities that are assigned and coordinated to support the University’s capability to initiate, implement, and complete the *Learning for Life* QEP. The plan includes broad-based involvement of stakeholders in the development and implementation of the QEP.

The implementation of the *Learning for Life* QEP involves two new positions: the QEP Director and the University Assessment Coordinator. The QEP Director is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the University’s QEP. Beginning July 1, 2017, the University Assessment Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating University assessment activities and analyzing data for market responsiveness. A QEP Assistant Director (with faculty status) will provide assistance to the QEP Director and chair the Implementation Team.

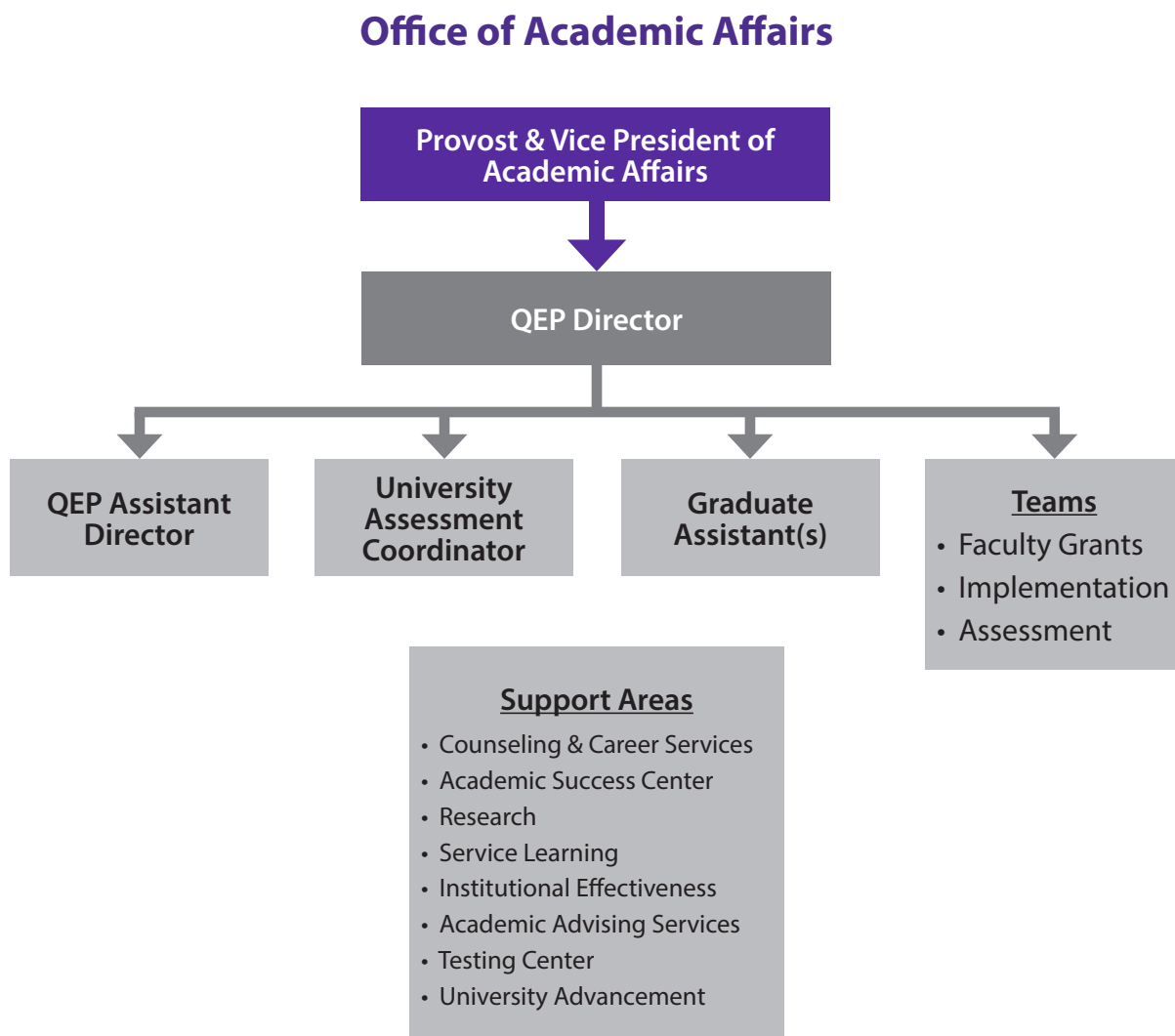
Three teams will assist the Director by providing support and direction for curricular development and program assessment: a Faculty Grants Team, an Implementation Team,

and an Assessment Team. Each team will be composed of faculty, staff, and a student representative.

Relationships with external stakeholders will be key to promoting broad-based participation and ensuring QEP success. Communication with civic and community leaders, alumni, and other constituents will provide opportunities for experiential learning activities through partnerships with business and industry. Initial presentations to the Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce, the NSU Foundation and Alumni Association Boards of Directors, and the Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance revealed strong support for the identification and creation of such public-private partnerships.

The *Learning for Life* organizational structure reflects the support needed to ensure the successful implementation and completion of the QEP.

QEP Organizational Chart



QEP Director

Role: The position administers and coordinates the QEP assuring that all stakeholders are involved. The person holding this position leads the following teams: Faculty Grants, Implementation, and Assessment.

Responsibilities:

- Administer the QEP budget
- Communicate with students, faculty, staff, and University stakeholders
- Meet with program faculty to refine curricula to include experiential learning activities
- Market the QEP
- Collaborate with the University Assessment Coordinator
- Maintain QEP website
- Develop and coordinate professional development activities
- Serve on the Institutional Effectiveness Committee
- Attend Curriculum Review Council meetings when appropriate
- Develop process for recognizing and rewarding student experiential learning success
- Compile 5-year SACSCOC QEP Impact Report

QEP Assistant Director

Role: Member of the faculty that will assist the QEP Director with oversight of the QEP and Chair the Implementation Team.

University Assessment Coordinator (position advertised spring 2017)

Role: Coordinate all University assessment activities and analyze data for market responsiveness.

Graduate Assistant

Role: Enters assessment data; assists with the distribution of materials and supplies for QEP Teams; and performs other duties as assigned.

Teams

Role: Teams provide support and institutional feedback in the implementation of the QEP.

- **Faculty Grants Team-** Reviews grant applications to ensure that program faculty engagement, preparedness, and support are adequate.
- **Implementation Team-** Reviews revised program curricula to ensure that all requirements of the *Learning for Life* QEP are met.
- **Assessment Team-** Reviews data for direct assessment of *Learning for Life* SLOs at the end of each semester and shares findings with faculty for program improvement.



Support Areas

Role: Support the implementation of the QEP with input from the QEP Director and the University Assessment Coordinator.

- **Counseling and Career Services.** Counseling and Career Services supports the QEP by providing counseling and career development programs and services to students, staff, and faculty. Counseling activities promote self-knowledge and the development of life skills through exploration, critical thinking, decision-making, and goal setting. Through the Job Location and Development program, off-campus employers assist students seeking employment in the Natchitoches community.
- **Academic Success Center.** The Academic Success Center supports the QEP through peer tutoring, time-management training, and professional development. Staff work closely with undergraduates completing research projects and provide editing services for students upon request. The center serves all students regardless of location or course delivery method.
- **Testing Center.** The Testing Center supports the QEP by providing a variety of testing options for students at Northwestern. The Testing Center provides access to assessment tests, instructional exams, and national program exams. It also provides proctoring services to students completing online or distance learning courses. The Testing Center adheres to the standards and guidelines of the National College Testing Association's (NCTA).
- **Research.** The University's Research Committee supports the QEP by sponsoring Research Day, which provides a forum for faculty and students to showcase research and other scholarly and creative works.
- **Service Learning.** The Office of Service Learning supports the QEP by promoting student learning and development through academic service learning. Through service learning projects, students use theory and skills learned in the classroom to solve real-life problems. The office promotes and develops service learning as pedagogy in undergraduate and graduate education. It provides faculty and staff consultation and guidance with project development, implementation, assessment, and curriculum integration. The Office of Service Learning also serves as a point of contact where the community and University can join together to identify needs and share resources.
- **Institutional Effectiveness.** The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources supports the QEP by assisting in meeting the timeline of the QEP and ensuring it is an integral part of the University's Strategic Plan. The office consists of the following areas: Institutional Research (IR), Institutional Effectiveness (IE), and Human Resources (HR). Institutional Research will provide historical data and reports required of the QEP.
- **Academic Advising Services.** Academic Advising Services supports the QEP by providing students assistance with academic planning. A director and five professional advisors serve approximately 1000 students each semester from the following cohorts:



exploratory (undeclared), associate/bachelor of general studies majors, pre-clinical nursing students, dual-enrollment, and visiting students. Professional advisors communicate with their students by phone, via online correspondence, and face-to-face. The Shreveport, Alexandria and Leesville campuses offer similar academic advising services through their campus managers (Alexandria and Leesville) and student services director (Shreveport).

- University Advancement.** The Office of University Advancement supports the QEP by facilitating relationships with alumni and supporters to secure financial resources and public-private partnerships with business and industry for experiential learning activities.

IX. Resources

Northwestern State University has established a plan to implement and sustain the *Learning for Life* QEP. Resources designated for supporting the QEP are identified in the table below, followed by a narrative description of relevant positions, teams, and expenditures.

Quality Enhancement Plan Budget, 2017 - 2021						
	SPRING 2017	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	TOTAL
Director	\$6,398	\$91,441	\$91,441	\$91,441	\$91,441	\$372,162
Assistant Director*	NA	\$12,795	\$12,795	\$12,795	\$12,795	\$51,180
University Assessment Coord.	NA	\$81,441	\$81,441	\$81,441	\$81,441	\$325,764
Administrative Coordinator	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$0
Pilot Program Coord. Stipends*	NA	\$17,913	NA	NA	NA	\$17,913
Program Coordinator Stipends*	NA	\$21,752	\$23,031	\$23,031	NA	\$67,814
Grants Team Stipends	\$6,398	\$6,398	\$6,398	NA	NA	\$19,194
Implementation Team Stipends*	\$5,000	\$7,148	\$7,148	\$7,148	NA	\$26,443
Assessment Team Stipends*	\$2,559	\$12,795	\$12,795	\$12,795	\$12,795	\$53,739
Graduate Assistants	\$10,000	\$16,200	\$16,200	\$16,200	\$16,200	\$74,800
Travel	\$5,000	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$77,000
Operating Services	\$5,000	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$15,000
Supplies	\$3,000	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$13,000
Professional Services	\$5,000	\$19,193	\$19,193	\$19,193	\$19,193	\$81,772
Other Charges	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$7,500
Capital Outlay	\$4,000	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$6,000
TOTAL	\$53,855	\$312,075	\$295,442	\$289,044	\$258,865	\$1,209,280

QEP Director. The QEP director will drive the implementation of Northwestern's QEP Learning for Life. The Director will be responsible for ensuring all stakeholders are engaged and will oversee all budget related expenditures. The person holding this position will provide guidance to the following QEP Teams: Faculty Grants, Implementation, and Assessment.

QEP Assistant Director. Member of the faculty that will assist the QEP Director with oversight of the QEP and chair the Implementation Team.

Faculty Grants Team. The Faculty Grants Team will consist of seven members; a chair and team members composed of faculty, staff and one student representative. Faculty will receive an extra services contract stipend plus related benefits or a course reduction per semester to lead the review of program proposals. The Faculty Grant Team will review grant applications to ensure that program faculty engagement, preparedness, and support are adequate.

Implementation Team. The Implementation Team will consist of seven members; a chair and team members composed of faculty, staff and one student representative. Faculty will receive an extra services contract stipend plus related benefits or a course reduction per semester. The Implementation Team will review revised program curricula to ensure that all requirements of the *Learning for Life* QEP are met.

Assessment Team. Reviews data for direct assessment of *Learning for Life* SLOs at the end of each semester and shares findings with faculty for program improvement. An assessment chair will be hired temporarily for the spring 2017 semester. This individual will receive a stipend plus related benefits. The position of University Assessment Coordinator was advertised in spring 2017, and the person selected will begin employment in July 2017. Thereafter, the duties and responsibilities of the assessment team chair will be assumed by the University Assessment Coordinator. Faculty and staff who are members of the Assessment Team will also receive a stipend plus related benefits.

Graduate Assistant. Enters assessment data; assists with the distribution of material and supplies for QEP teams, and performs other duties as assigned.

Operating Services and Professional Services. Enhancing knowledge and skill of faculty in experiential learning is critical to the success of the University's QEP. Professional development opportunities will be ongoing and will include using in-house faculty experts as well as nationally recognized speakers. Faculty awareness of topics such as principles of experiential learning and high impact practices began with faculty forums conducted in October 2016 and continued with panel discussions held during Faculty Institute, January 2017. Sessions on grading rubrics and assessment of SLOs will be conducted during the spring 2017 semester. In August 2017, the University will sponsor an experiential learning retreat to provide relevant faculty and staff intensive training on implementation and assessment.

Travel. This line item is for travel related to the QEP Director, QEP leaders, and QEP program coordinators. These funds will be used for travel to professional conferences to promote and present research and to gather resources for the QEP.

Marketing. These funds will be used to market the QEP to the campus and local community. Initial marketing during the spring 2017 and FY 17-18 will entail larger expenditures than future year marketing expenditures as reflected in the budget.

Capital Outlay. These expenditures are for the initial setup and ongoing costs of the QEP Director's office. These will include computer, printer, telephone, and maintenance expenditures. These expenditures may also include the purchase of resources needed to implement the QEP in academic programs.

X. Assessment

The goal of the *Learning for Life* QEP, as described in previous sections, is preparing students to transfer theory into practice as they transition from University settings to a career or advanced study in graduate schools or professional schools. In order to achieve this goal, a thorough and systematic assessment plan must be implemented. This will be accomplished through a series of direct and indirect measures. In order to ensure that the SLOs are met and that each program is effective and relevant, these measures will be implemented in each year of the QEP.

Student Learning Outcomes

The National Society for Experiential Education (1998) identified "Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities." After an extensive review of the eight principles and other available literature, the Northwestern QEP Task Force identified two Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that will help to achieve the goals of the QEP:

- **SLO 1:** During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines.
- **SLO 2:** During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection.

By focusing on these two SLOs, Northwestern faculty and staff will be able to verify that high-impact experiences across disciplines enrich student learning and offer opportunities for professional growth and real world experience. In order to coordinate the assessment plan, Northwestern has hired a University Assessment Coordinator to collect and analyze data across all programs, provide feedback to faculty and administration, and collaborate with faculty and administration for areas of program improvement.

The QEP will address all eight principles. However, the plan will focus on several specific principles in conjunction with the SLOs. Both outcomes will address Authenticity, which ensures that each experience has a real world context and/or is applicable to real situations. The Assessment and Evaluation principle is also a requirement for both SLOs and accordingly provides “a means to develop and refine the specific learning goals and quality outcomes identified during the planning stages of the experience.”

SLO 1 will focus on the development of the students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions (KSDs). KSDs align with Principle 1, Intention. Intention addresses the “why” of the experience. Intention represents “purposefulness that enables the experience to become knowledge.” The SLO 1 also aligns with Principle 2: Preparedness and Planning. This principle is written in a way that addresses the need for participants to “enter the experience with sufficient foundation to support a successful experience.” It also calls for students to identify their intentions for their plan and to use their intentions as goals.

SLO 2 will focus on the students’ reflections. Reflection, Principle 4, is defined as “the element that transforms simple experience to a learning experience.” Reflection is central to all parts of the experiential learning process and ensures that students are thinking critically about what they have experienced and learned. Monitoring and Continuous Improvement, Principle 6, is also an important part of reflection. It must be included in order to ensure that “the experience . . . continues to provide the richest learning possible, while affirming the learner.”

Using this research as a basis for the plan, the *Learning for Life* QEP ultimately aims to ensure that every student who graduates from Northwestern will leave the university with knowledge, skills, and dispositions gathered through reflective practices. This, in turn, will aid in preparing them for life after college.

Direct Assessment of SLOs

To ensure that the SLOs are appropriate and effective, Northwestern will gather direct assessment data. In determining how to assess the SLOs, VALUE rubrics from the AAC&U were studied and experiential learning items gathered. The resulting rubrics will provide data for assessing the ability of students to create meaningful self-reflections and the application of knowledge gained during their experiences.

For SLO 1, the rubric will focus on the outcome: “During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry level professionals in their disciplines.” Questions will be asked regarding the students’ ability to correlate prior life experiences with academic knowledge, connect concepts, adapt and implement previous knowledge and skills, communicate effectively, expand sense of future self, and demonstrate professional behaviors and dispositions. The benchmarks used on the rubric align with the eight principles. Benchmark 1 aligns with Principle 2, Preparedness and Planning. Benchmark 2 aligns with Principle 1, Intention. Benchmark 3 aligns with Principle 6, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement. Benchmark 4 aligns with both Principle 2,



Preparedness and Planning, and Principle 6, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement. Benchmark 5 aligns with Principle 4, Reflection, and Benchmark 6 aligns with Principle 2, Preparedness and Planning, and 6, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement.

For SLO 2 the rubric will focus on the outcome: "During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection." Students will be evaluated on their ability to communicate effectively, connect prior learning, apply knowledge and skills, assess what they have learned about themselves as part of a community, and assess what they have learned about themselves as individuals. The benchmarks used on the rubric align with the eight principles. Benchmark 1 aligns with Principle 2, Preparedness and Planning, as well as Principle 6, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement. Benchmark 2 aligns with Principle 4, Reflection. Benchmark 3 aligns with Principle 4, Reflection, as well as Principle 6, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement. Benchmarks 4 and 5 align with Principle 7, Assessment and Evaluation.

The rubrics for both SLOs contain four levels of assessment: 4 is Advanced; 3 is Mastery; 2 is Basic; and 1 is Developing. The goal is for 50% of students to score at a Level 3 or Level 4 on 50% of the items contained on the rubric. The benchmark is for 50% of students in each program to have an average score of 3 or greater.

Rubrics for SLOs

SLO 1: During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines.

Benchmark	Advanced (4)	Mastery (3)	Basic (2)	Developing (1)
Students will... <i>Correlate prior life experiences with academic knowledge and experiences.</i> Principle 2	Synthesizes connections between previous experiences and current area of study, demonstrating an in depth understanding which broadens the student's point of view.	Selects a variety of pertinent, personal life experiences to expand one's knowledge of the concepts in area of study.	Compares academic knowledge and past experiences to identify similarities and differences, and insights new to the student.	Identifies similarities of life experiences and academic knowledge and know they relate to student's interests.
<i>Connect concepts through an interdisciplinary perspective.</i> Principle 1	Critiques or synthesizes relationships between knowledge and values from the perspective of two or more disciplines.	Connects and examines ideals, theories, tenets, or concepts from the perspective of two or more disciplines.	Connect facts and basic concepts from the perspective of two or more disciplines (when prompted).	Presents facts and basic concepts from the perspective of two or more disciplines (when prompted).



Benchmark	Advanced (4)	Mastery (3)	Basic (2)	Developing (1)
<i>Adapt and implement previously learned knowledge and skills to new contexts, situations, or scenarios. Principle 6</i>	Adapts previously learned skills, theories, values, and/or knowledge in the implementation of solving difficult or complex problems.	Adapts previously learned skills and knowledge in order to solve problems or prevent new problems.	Applies skills & knowledge learned from two or more previous experiences to a new situation.	Applies previously learned skills & knowledge to a new situation.
<i>Communicate effectively. Principles 2 & 6</i>	Consistently communicates (methods may vary) efficiently and effectively, resulting in enhanced understanding of content.	Consistently communicates (methods may vary) efficiently and effectively.	Communicates (methods may vary) effectively utilizing basic skills.	Communicates (methods may vary) utilizing basic skills inconsistently.
<i>Expand sense of future self through reflection on participation in experiential learning processes. Principle 4</i>	After reflecting on experiential learning experiences, examines future self and develops action plan to reach this goal.	Examines changes in self in relation to experiential learning and potential for growth in different areas	Communicates one's strengths and weaknesses in several areas/ contexts (i.e. Skills: knowledge; skills: application; skills: valuing).	Describes one's strengths and weaknesses.
<i>Demonstrate professional characteristics and behaviors. Principles 2 & 6</i>	Consistently demonstrates professional characteristics and behaviors such as punctuality, well-developed work ethic, positive attitude, self-initiative, conflict resolution, integrity, ethics, and effective communication with peers and supervisors.	Usually demonstrates professional behaviors and dispositions; needs improvement in one or two areas.	Sometimes demonstrates professional behaviors and dispositions; needs improvement in three areas.	Rarely demonstrates professional behaviors and dispositions; needs improvement in all or almost all areas.

Note: Adapted from AAC&U VALUE Rubrics.



SLO 2: During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection.

Benchmark	Advanced (4)	Mastery (3)	Basic (2)	Developing (1)
<p>Students will... <i>Communicate effectively using appropriate conventions of language and correct format(s).</i> Principles 2 & 6</p>	<p>Completes assignment(s) by consistently using appropriate conventions of language and correct format(s) so that the interdependence of language, meaning and thought are clearly expressed.</p>	<p>Completes assignment(s) by using appropriate conventions of language and correct format(s) so that explicitly connects content and form while demonstrating awareness of purpose and audience.</p>	<p>Completes assignment(s) by using appropriate conventions of language and correct format(s) so that connects in a basic way the content to the product.</p>	<p>Completes assignment(s) in an appropriate manner.</p>
<p><i>Connect prior learning to changes that are a direct result of the experiential learning process.</i> Principle 4</p>	<p>Revisits prior learning in depth to identify significant changes in perceptions about educational and real world experiences, providing the foundation for continual expansion of knowledge as well as personal growth and maturity.</p>	<p>Revisits prior learning in depth to reveal deeper meanings and broader perspectives about educational and real world events.</p>	<p>Revisits prior learning in some depth to reveal slightly deeper meanings and broader perspectives about educational and real world events.</p>	<p>Revisits prior learning at a superficial level without truly revealing any clarified meaning or gaining a broader perspective of educational or real world experiences.</p>
<p><i>Revisit prior learning to apply knowledge and skills in new and innovative ways.</i> Principles 4 & 6</p>	<p>Makes clear references to prior learning and applies it in new and innovative ways that demonstrate comprehension.</p>	<p>Makes references to prior learning and shows some evidence of applying it in new and innovative ways that demonstrate comprehension.</p>	<p>Makes some references to prior learning and attempts to apply it in new and innovative ways that demonstrate comprehension.</p>	<p>Makes vague references to prior learning but does not apply it in new and innovative ways that demonstrate comprehension.</p>
<p><i>Assess what they have learned about themselves as members of a broader community.</i> Principle 7</p>	<p>Expresses insights into own biases and/or cultural rules, showing how experiences have influenced these rules/biases resulting in a shift in understanding.</p>	<p>Identifies new perspectives about own biases and/or cultural rules resulting in a certain level of comfort with new and differing perspectives.</p>	<p>Identifies own biases and/or cultural rules with a strong preference for those rules while seeking the same in others.</p>	<p>Shows nominal awareness about own biases and/or cultural rules and somewhat uncomfortable with cultural differences.</p>



Benchmark	Advanced (4)	Mastery (3)	Basic (2)	Developing (1)
<i>Assess what they have learned about themselves as individuals.</i> Principle 7	Exhibits a strong sense of self as a learner; builds on prior knowledge and experiences to address new and challenging situations.	Assesses changes in own learning and perceptions over time, identifying complex contextual factors.	Communicates strengths and challenges to learning through increased self-awareness.	Defines own performance with general terms such as success and failure.

Note: Adapted from AAC&U VALUE Rubrics.

Indirect Assessment of SLOs

While direct assessment of SLOs will provide meaningful data about student learning, indirect measures of the program must also be implemented to ensure effectiveness. Therefore, the following surveys will be developed and distributed to students, faculty, and administrators participating in the implementation of the QEP:

- A survey to assess student perceptions of capstone experiential learning courses and to gather information for the improvement of those experiences.
- A survey to assess graduating student perceptions of experiential learning and suggestions for improvement.
- A survey to assess faculty perceptions of program experiential learning activities and the QEP as a whole.
- A survey to assess faculty perceptions of training provided during the implementation of the QEP.
- A survey to assess administrative perceptions of the QEP and its implementation.

Pilot Study

In the spring 2017 semester, Northwestern began the process of implementing the QEP with seven programs. The programs include Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Radiologic Science, Health and Exercise Science, Hospitality Management and Tourism, Music Performance, and Scholars' College. These programs provided examples of each type of experiential learning addressed in the QEP, and they have demonstrated a long-term commitment to using experiential learning practices. As part of the pilot study, these programs worked to align existing assessments with the new QEP assessments and benchmarks. Using the results generated by this study, pilot program QEP coordinators evaluated the QEP process and made recommendations for improvement, as described in the 2017 QEP Annual Report.



Assessment of Learning for Life Outputs

In addition to assessing SLOs and using direct and indirect assessments, Northwestern will also assess the QEP’s effectiveness through measures that assess institutional change and the viability of the QEP. These include the following performance measures:

- Feedback from graduates
- Number of students participating in each program’s experiential learning activities
- Number of experiential learning opportunities provided in each program
- Number of professional development sessions/workshops provided to faculty
- Quality of professional development sessions/workshops provided to faculty
- Number of faculty members attending professional development sessions/workshops

Assessment Timeline

In spring 2017, an Assessment Team composed of faculty, staff, and a student representative was established to coordinate assessment activities with program faculty, the University Assessment Coordinator, and the Director of QEP. The Assessment Team will work with the newly-hired University Assessment Coordinator and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources to develop survey instruments and establish a data system by fall 2017. Assessment activities will follow the timeline below:

Assessment Activities	Spring 2017	Summer 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021
Pilot	X									
Hire Assessment Coordinator		X								
Form Teams	X	X								
Direct			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Indirect			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Program applications for grants	X			X		X		X		



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Appendices



Appendix 1- Meeting Notes

QEP Steering Committee

Notes/Comments

January 21, 2015 – 10:00AM to 11:30AM

- I. Members
 - a. Present: Dr. Kathy Autrey – Assistant Professor of Mathematics, Department of Mathematics
 - b. Absent: Dr. Massimo Bezoari – Faculty Senate President and Professor of Chemistry, Louisiana Scholars' College
 - c. Absent: Ms. Candace Churchman – Graduate Curriculum and Instruction Major and Online Student
 - d. Present: Dr. Debra Clark – Assistant Professor of Nursing, College of Nursing
 - e. Absent: Dr. Betsy Cochran – Professor of Ecology and Mathematics, Louisiana Scholars' College
 - f. Absent: Mr. Christopher Gist – Bachelor of Science in Nursing Major and Shreveport Campus Student
 - g. Present: Dr. Dustin Hebert – Associate Professor of Education Technology, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Counseling
 - h. Present: Mr. Steven Hicks – Past QEP Director and Executive Director of Academic Advising Services
 - i. Present: Mr. Curtis Penrod – Coordinator of Computer Information Systems and Assistant Professor, School of Business
 - j. Absent: Ms. Kyla Winey – SGA President, Communications Major, and Natchitoches Campus Student

- II. The committee started reviewing information by first looking at the results of the survey which was sent to the units and student learning outcome coordinators
 - a. A review of the results showed some consistent issues across the responses:
 - i. Communication/writing/speaking
 - ii. Applications of skills/content knowledge to real world
 - iii. Basic math skills/statistics/mathematical processing
 - iv. Critical thinking
 - b. Discussion ensued about some of these areas particularly communication; the committee discussed the idea of needing to further refine communication
 - i. What is the issue with communication? Verbal? Written? Both?
 - ii. It was noted that NSU's online students are particularly weak in communication skills.
 - iii. Dr. Hebert talked about McNeese's previous QEP of writing across the curriculum which involved putting writing enriched courses in every curriculum and also creating a writing center
 - c. The committee also discussed contacting the non-responders to the survey and giving them another opportunity to respond (this task has now been done).

- III. The committee also discussed the desire to review the student learning outcomes and general education outcomes in more detail. Mr. Penrod informed the committee who would ask Ms.



Biscoe for this information. (This task was done and Ms. Biscoe reiterated that most of the information was simply unavailable.)

- IV. The committee also discussed data points from the other information which was sent.
- a. Mr. Penrod had previously prepared some notes (see other document) regarding the NSSE, grade distribution report, and retention/persistence reports.
 - b. On the NSSE, Mr. Penrod noted some of the most significant items. Dr. Clark also mentioned the response to 14.g. (how much does your institution help you manage your non-academic responsibilities) and noted how a counselor had helped the ASN students quite a bit.
 - c. Mr. Penrod also noted on the grade distribution how STEM areas have a lower passage rate than non-STEM areas. Also, for all but two departments, students do better in face-to-face sections than online sections.
 - i. Mr. Penrod was asked to break out the online sections by undergraduate and graduate level by department as well as look at class size.
 - ii. As one of the departments which has a higher passage rate in their online classes, Dr. Clark noted that Nursing made the decision to not put certain classes online. At a certain point, a discussion occurred within the department about what classes should be online.
 - iii. Dr. Autrey noted for her classes, one of the biggest issues was repeaters (students who failed in the classroom so they are taking it online).
 - iv. Also, some students have to take online classes when they do not wish to do so simply because of availability or their schedule.
 - v. Many faculty do not wish to teach online, but are forced to do so.
 - vi. The University does a great job of teaching the technology for online classes; it does not do such a great job teaching pedagogy.
 - vii. A discussion also occurred about the type of students which are online and how some students need a face-to-face environment.
 - d. The committee also discussed the retention/persistence differences between online and non-online students:
 - i. The committee agreed differences exist between online and non-online students. However, the committee did not know if the differences were truly related to student learning outcomes.
 - ii. The University could do a comparison of online vs. non-online students.
 - iii. In addition, questions could be asked regarding online vs. non-online learning in a survey of faculty.
 - iv. The committee also stated the issue might be one of engagement and the number of logins by a student might be an indicator of success in the course. Mr. Penrod is to contact Jarrod Sanson to see if the number of logins was related to the grade in the class.
 - e. The committee also discussed the difference in success between students with and without remedial needs:
 - i. Dr. Autrey talked about the large amount of data regarding students with remedial need and the ongoing pilot project. She does have a report.



- ii. Mr. Penrod expressed concern about using remedial need as a possible QEP topic as the Board of Regents might discontinue the pilot program. Dr. Autrey made the point that the Board of Regents might be more amenable to keeping the pilot program for students with remedial need if the University QEP was based on it.

V. Next Steps (Outstanding Issues)

- a. Ms. Pharris will provide information on graduate student retention. (From Previous Meeting)
- b. Dr. Cochran will provide information on her analysis of the Student Evaluation of Course and Instructor. (From Previous Meeting)
- c. The committee will be reviewing the data as it is made available for review at the next committee meeting.
- d. The survey of unit heads and SLO coordinators was to be reopened for those areas which had not responded.
- e. Mr. Penrod was to contact Mr. Sanson regarding the number of logins.
- f. Dr. Autrey was to provide a report regarding remedial needs.
- g. Mr. Penrod will schedule the next meeting in February to review the data and plan further steps.



**QEP Steering Committee
Notes/Comments
February 11, 2015 – 11:00AM to 12:00PM**

- VI. Members
- a. Present: Dr. Kathy Autrey – Assistant Professor of Mathematics, Department of Mathematics
 - b. Present: Dr. Massimo Bezoari – Faculty Senate President and Professor of Chemistry, Louisiana Scholars' College
 - c. Absent: Ms. Candace Churchman – Graduate Curriculum and Instruction Major and Online Student
 - d. Present: Dr. Debra Clark – Assistant Professor of Nursing, College of Nursing
 - e. Present: Dr. Betsy Cochran – Professor of Ecology and Mathematics, Louisiana Scholars' College
 - f. Absent: Mr. Christopher Gist – Bachelor of Science in Nursing Major and Shreveport Campus Student
 - g. Present: Dr. Dustin Hebert – Associate Professor of Education Technology, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Counseling
 - h. Absent: Mr. Steven Hicks – Past QEP Director and Executive Director of Academic Advising Services
 - i. Present: Mr. Curtis Penrod – Coordinator of Computer Information Systems and Assistant Professor, School of Business
 - j. Absent: Ms. Kyla Winey – SGA President, Communications Major, and Natchitoches Campus Student
- VII. The committee discussed questions from last times and items which were sent out since that time period.
- a. A discussion regarding the focus of the committee and exactly what its responsibilities entailed occurred. Mr. Penrod stated that we are to provide broad topics which can be addressed in a more specific way in a proposal.
 - b. The committee also discussed some of the items which were sent out. Many of the items which were sent out went along with previous discussions.
- VIII. Mr. Penrod then brought up a discussion of the timeline as Ms. Roni Biscoe had informed him that the president was requesting it.
- a. After discussion, the group decided Mr. Penrod would prepare a Powerpoint listing their top five areas from the data reviewed.
 - b. This Powerpoint would then be presented to faculty/staff groups in Alexandria, Leesville, Natchitoches (a couple of times), and Shreveport for their feedback and any additional ideas they may have. These meetings would occur over the next few weeks through the end of March.
 - c. During the week of March 30th, the responses to these meetings will be gathered and a final survey of the top five choices will be sent to faculty, staff, and students. This survey will be open from April 13th to April 26th.
 - d. During the week of April 27th, recommendations will be given to the administration.



- e. The committee also discussed the need to make a recommendation(s) regarding student learning outcomes, general education outcomes, and instructional design/pedagogy.
- IX. The following items were not discussed (or were discussed quickly) at the meeting, but are outstanding issues which have been addressed.
- a. Mr. Penrod contacted Mr. Sanson regarding the number of logins, but was told he had no systematic way of getting logins as requested by the group.
 - b. Mr. Penrod contacted Ms. Biscoe regarding SLOs and general education outcomes. Some information was sent to the committee while he was told other pieces of information were unavailable.
 - c. Mr. Penrod was unable to compare class size for online versus non-online classes based on the current file. If the committee wishes, another file could be requested.
 - d. On a comparison of success in online versus non-online classes, Mr. Penrod did divide the classes between graduate and undergraduate and find the following:
 - i. For undergraduate classwork, Family and Consumers Sciences and Nursing and Allied Health were the only units where online classes had a higher success rate.
 - ii. For graduate students, Language and Communication and Nursing and Allied Health were the only units where online classes had a higher success rate. However, one must be careful as the N was very low for Language and Communication. In addition, Criminal Justice and Family and Consumer Sciences were only online while Psychology was only face-to-face.
- X. Next Steps (Outstanding Issues)
- a. Mr. Penrod will prepare a Powerpoint to be reviewed by the committee.
 - b. Mr. Penrod will set up meeting times for faculty/staff/students. (Mr. Penrod has now reserved the President's Room in the Student Union for 3:30 on Tuesday, March 3rd and for 9:00 on Friday, March 20th.)
 - c. Mr. Penrod will schedule the next meeting in March to review the data and plan further steps.

**QEP Steering Committee
Notes/Comments
March 31, 2015 – 4:00 PM to 5:00 PM**

- XI. Members
- a. Absent: Dr. Kathy Autrey – Assistant Professor of Mathematics, Department of Mathematics
 - b. Present: Dr. Massimo Bezoari – Faculty Senate President and Professor of Chemistry, Louisiana Scholars' College
 - c. Absent: Ms. Candace Churchman – Graduate Curriculum and Instruction Major and Online Student
 - d. Present: Dr. Debra Clark – Assistant Professor of Nursing, College of Nursing
 - e. Present: Dr. Betsy Cochran – Professor of Ecology and Mathematics, Louisiana Scholars' College
 - f. Absent: Mr. Christopher Gist – Bachelor of Science in Nursing Major and Shreveport Campus Student
 - g. Absent: Dr. Dustin Hebert – Associate Professor of Education Technology, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Counseling
 - h. Present: Mr. Steven Hicks – Past QEP Director and Executive Director of Academic Advising Services
 - i. Present: Mr. Curtis Penrod – Coordinator of Computer Information Systems and Assistant Professor, School of Business
 - j. Absent: Ms. Kyla Winey – SGA President, Communications Major, and Natchitoches Campus Student
- XII. The committee talked about the various areas and whether to add any additional areas or change the wording of any of the areas. Based on the feedback from the presentations, the committee decided to leave the five areas as is.
- XIII. The committee also discussed the survey which is to go out to faculty, staff, and students. The introduction to the survey was discussed as well as whether to rank the items or choose the top two or three. The committee decided a ranking would be more appropriate.
- XIV. The committee also discussed the recommendations regarding student learning outcomes and general education outcomes. Mr. Penrod asked Dr. Cochran and Dr. Bezoari to put together a proposed statement regarding these areas.
- XV. Next Steps (Outstanding Issues)
- a. Mr. Penrod will work with Ms. Biscoe to set up the survey and send it out to the committee for review. Upon their approval, it will be sent out to faculty, staff, and students.
 - b. Dr. Cochran and Dr. Bezoari will put together a statement regarding the learning outcomes.
 - c. Mr. Penrod will schedule the next meeting in April at the conclusion of the survey.



**QEP Steering Committee
Notes/Comments
December 3, 2014 - 3:30 to 4:40**

- XVI. Each member introduced themselves
- Dr. Kathy Autrey – Assistant Professor of Mathematics, Department of Mathematics
 - Dr. Massimo Bezoari – Faculty Senate President and Professor of Chemistry, Louisiana Scholars' College
 - Absent: Ms. Candace Churchman – Graduate Curriculum and Instruction Major and Online Student
 - Dr. Debra Clark – Assistant Professor of Nursing, College of Nursing
 - Dr. Betsy Cochran – Professor of Ecology and Mathematics, Louisiana Scholars' College
 - Mr. Christopher Gist – Bachelor of Science in Nursing Major and Shreveport Campus Student
 - Dr. Dustin Hebert – Associate Professor of Education Technology, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Counseling
 - Mr. Steven Hicks – Past QEP Director and Executive Director of Academic Advising Services
 - Mr. Curtis Penrod – Coordinator of Computer Information Systems and Assistant Professor, School of Business
 - Absent: Ms. Kyla Winey – SGA President, Communications Major, and Natchitoches Campus Student
 - Guest: Ms. Veronica Biscoe – Director of University Planning, Assessment, and EEO
 - Guest: Ms. Lily Pharris - Director of Institutional Research
- XVII. An overview of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was given
- Gave out a description of the QEP
 - So, what is the QEP? “a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issues(s) emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on enhancing student learning or the environment supporting student learning.”
 - HAS TO ADDRESS STUDENT LEARNING
 - We are not responsible for writing the QEP. That task will fall to another committee. However, we are responsible for the first and fourth question under the “Relevant Questions for Consideration in the preparation of the QEP”.
- XVIII. Overview of QEP Steering Committee Purpose and Role
- Our main purpose and role is to identify “significant issues” for consideration by the administration and the committee which will write the QEP.
 - These “significant” issues should come from quantitative and qualitative data
 - Viable QEP topic (“significant issues”) examples include 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.
 - With the above being said, we all might have our preconceived notions of possible QEP topics. Try to set those aside and let the data drive the discussion.



- e. Thus, we need to look at quantitative data, determine what the most important pieces of data/information are, present this data/information data to the University community, gather qualitative feedback from them (as well as possible surveys on other issues), and determine our top two or three most “significant” issues
 - f. Proposed tentative outline of how we accomplish this task
 - i. Today – determine data needs; if we need to do a survey(s), determine who/what/when we will ask (key skills and importance, weaknesses for existing SLOs)
 - ii. Over the next month – gather the data; review data; determine follow-ups
 - iii. January – meet to determine most important data to present, who to present to, when, and where
 - iv. January through February – gather feedback through meetings
 - v. First two weeks of March – meet to analyze and compile qualitative data
 - vi. Last two weeks of March – based on information gathered, prioritize ideas and make top two or three recommendations of “significant issues” to the administration
 - vii. TBD - Receive feedback report from administration
- XIX. Discussion of Data Needs and Request of Data
- a. Data Points from Institutional Research Were Given and Requested Everyone Review
 - i. Graduation, Persistence, and Retention - <http://oir.nsula.edu/2013-201/>
 - 1. Fall to Fall Persistence (Retention + Graduation) Rates - <http://oir.nsula.edu/assets/Uploads/2012-to-2013-Worksheet.xlsx>
 - 2. Six-Year Retention and Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Students - <http://oir.nsula.edu/assets/FT-Degree-Seeking-Cohort-1314.xlsx>
 - 3. Dr. Clark if the information was only for undergraduates. It is, but Mr. Penrod informed her that a graduate student retention worksheet (with less detail) was available. The committee requested Mrs. Pharris provide that information to Mr. Penrod who will forward it to the committee when it is received.
 - ii. Grade Distribution Reports
 - 1. A discussion of grade distribution reports also occurred. They are available, but not through the website. A discussion of what to include occurred. Mrs. Pharris will pull this information and provide it to Mr. Penrod who will provide it to the committee. (Mr. Penrod and Mrs. Pharris have communicated after the meeting and an Excel file containing semester, subject, number, department, mode of delivery, location, core vs. non-core fields and the grade distribution will be provided for use in a PivotTable. No instructor names will be included.)
 - iii. A clarifying point was made by Dr. Bezoari that none of the above were student learning outcomes. Mr. Penrod concurred with that assessment, but noted the information the University has on student learning outcomes is imperfect. Both the above and the surveys below would serve as indicators for further investigation. Ms.



Biscoe also explained some of the history of student learning outcomes at the University as well as the disparity between units.

- b. Data Points from University Planning/Assessment were also discussed-
<http://universityplanning.nsula.edu/results/>
 - i. Collegiate Learning Assessment -
<http://universityplanning.nsula.edu/assets/Uploads/CLA1112-ReportNorthwestern-State-University.pdf>
 - ii. National Survey of Student Engagement – Ms. Biscoe will be adding 2014 shortly; this document also has some comparison to other schools which could be used -
<http://universityplanning.nsula.edu/assets/Uploads/NSSE12-Mean-and-Frequency-Reports-Northwestern-State.pdf>
 - iii. Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory -
<http://universityplanning.nsula.edu/assets/Uploads/Northwestern-State-University-SSI-06-2013.pdf>
 - iv. Student Evaluation of Course & Instructor – Dr. Cochran has done some analysis on the Student Evaluation of Course & Instructor and will provide that analysis to Mr. Penrod who will share with the committee.
 - v. Graduating Student Survey (has questions regarding core) -
<http://universityplanning.nsula.edu/assets/Uploads/GSS-ResultsSpring2011-Spring2013.xlsx>
 - vi. The committee also discussed how most of these data points were attitudinal surveys and not actual measurements of student learning outcomes. Mr. Penrod again concurred with that assessment, but noted these points (particularly the NSSE and the SEI analysis) may lead us to further investigation.
- c. Surveys
 - i. Department Heads/SLO Coordinators
 - 1. The committee did feel a survey of department heads and/or student learning outcomes coordinators may glean useful (perhaps the most useful) information regarding weaknesses in student learning.
 - 2. Mr. Penrod and Ms. Biscoe will work together to survey them on weaknesses student learning outcomes
 - ii. Students/Faculty/Staff/Alumni/Employers (maybe)
 - 1. Mr. Penrod asked if we wanted to survey students, faculty, staff, alumni, or employees regarding student learning outcomes
 - 2. A discussion ensued regarding surveying employers on their views of student learning. Some amiable disagreement occurred regarding such a survey. Mr. Penrod suggested we table an employer survey for now and the committee agreed.
 - 3. The committee also agreed we should wait on a faculty survey on student learning
 - 4. Mr. Penrod asked Mr. Gist his thoughts from the student perspective and Mr. Gist gave some insights regarding the more personal, focused natured of student learning on the Shreveport campus as opposed to the Natchitoches campus. As Mr. Gist is in clinicals, the learning is more hands-

on and involves a smaller faculty to student ratio than was available in Natchitoches.

XX. Next Steps

- a. Ms. Pharris will provide information on graduate student retention.
- b. Ms. Pharris will provide information on grade distributions.
- c. Ms. Biscoe will add NSSE 2014 information to the website.
- d. Mr. Penrod and Ms. Biscoe will prepare a survey to send to department heads/SLO coordinators. This survey will be sent out to the committee for approval before it is sent out to department heads/SLO coordinators.
- e. Dr. Cochran will provide information on her analysis of the Student Evaluation of Course and Instructor.
- f. The committee will be reviewing the data as it is made available for review at the next committee meeting.
- g. Mr. Gist, Ms. Winey, and Ms. Churchman have also been asked to provide any additional thoughts from the student perspective.
- h. Mr. Penrod will schedule the next meeting in January to review the data and plan further steps.

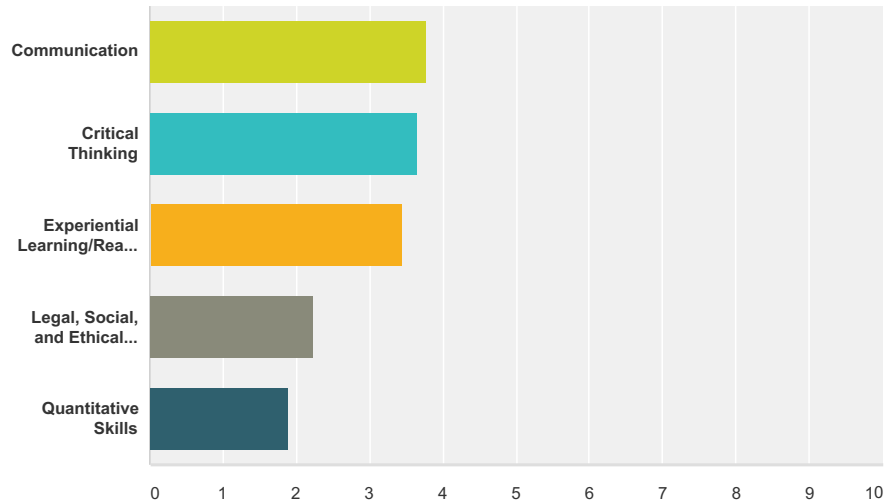


Appendix 2 - QEP Survey Report April 2015

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Survey

Q1 Please look at the five areas and consider which areas you believe could have proposals with the most impact on student learning at the University. Based on your judgment, please rank the five areas.

Answered: 588 Skipped: 16

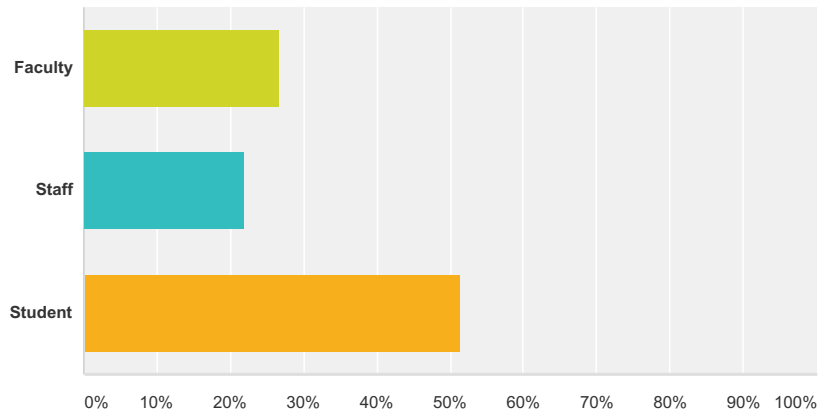


	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Score
Communication	36.05% 212	27.72% 163	19.56% 115	11.73% 69	4.93% 29	588	3.78
Critical Thinking	27.30% 160	31.91% 187	23.04% 135	13.82% 81	3.92% 23	586	3.65
Experiential Learning/Real World Application	27.43% 161	21.98% 129	26.58% 156	16.01% 94	8.01% 47	587	3.45
Legal, Social, and Ethical Considerations	5.27% 31	10.03% 59	16.50% 97	38.95% 229	29.25% 172	588	2.23
Quantitative Skills	3.92% 23	8.35% 49	14.31% 84	19.59% 115	53.83% 316	587	1.89

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Survey

Q2 Please mark your classification.

Answered: 602 Skipped: 2

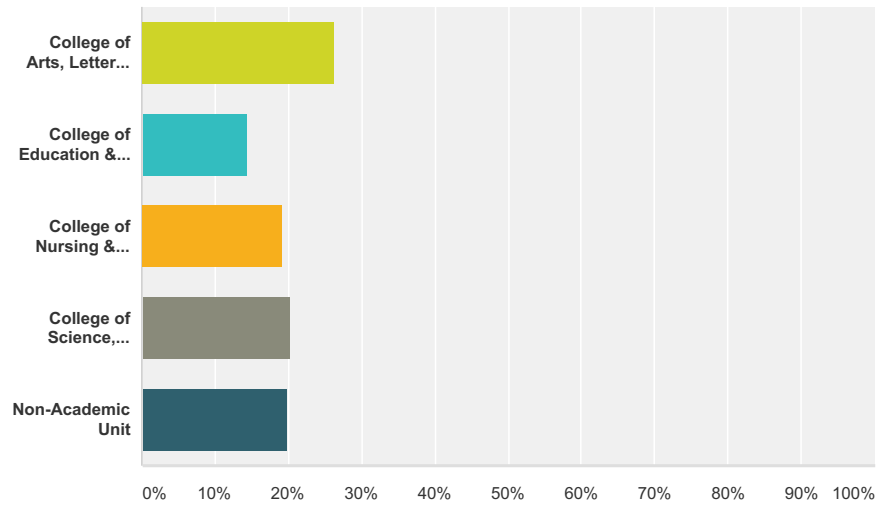


Answer Choices	Responses
Faculty	26.74% 161
Staff	21.93% 132
Student	51.33% 309
Total	602

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Survey

Q3 Please select your academic/non-academic unit.

Answered: 603 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses
College of Arts, Letters, Graduate Studies & Research	26.37% 159
College of Education & Human Development	14.43% 87
College of Nursing & School of Allied Health	19.24% 116
College of Science, Technology, & Business	20.23% 122
Non-Academic Unit	19.73% 119
Total	603

Appendix 3 - QEP Submission Form

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SACSCOC Reaffirmation 2017

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Submission Form

The NSU Quality Enhancement Plan Core Team invites the University community to propose potential QEPs.

Who is invited to participate? All members of the NSU community (faculty, staff, students, and other interested stakeholders) are invited to submit ideas. Proposals from single or team-based authors will be accepted.

When is the deadline? September 15, 2015 by 11:59 p.m.

Where do I submit my proposal? Email your proposal to bouckg@nsula.edu

How should I submit my proposal? Proposals must be submitted electronically in a single PDF. *Hard copies of proposals, submissions with multiple attachments, and late submissions will not be accepted.*

General information regarding the QEP

Northwestern State University will submit a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to SACSCOC as a condition of reaffirmation. The QEP Team has been appointed by Dr. Abney to develop and facilitate this process, which includes this call for proposals that invites participation from faculty, staff, students, and other interested stakeholders across the educational programs and academic support units.

Once proposals are submitted using the template, they will be evaluated using the attached rubric. The Core Team will forward the ten highest ranked proposals to the University Leadership Team. Once a proposal is selected by them, new teams will be formed to develop that proposal into a QEP.

Once the QEP has been approved by SACSCOC, the University will begin implementing the plan. We will submit a QEP Impact Report to SACSCOC in 2022 to share information about the progress and success of the QEP in meeting intended outcomes.

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. For more information regarding the goals and objectives of the QEP, please visit www.sacscoc.org.

As you heard at our January meeting, the QEP process involves broad-based input from faculty, staff, students, and constituents.

The QEP will be reviewed and approved by a team of SACSCOC peer reviewers as a condition for our reaffirmation, and the formulation of the QEP must meet the following criteria:

Alignment with University Mission must be a part of the QEP. The University Mission is as follows:

Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution that is committed to the creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching, research, and service. The University maintains as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs. Northwestern State University prepares its students to become productive members of society and promotes economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region.

A successful QEP will tie mission with the proposed activities and strategies, and in turn, the University must show that it has sufficient resources to initiate, implement, sustain, and complete the QEP. Finally, the plan must illustrate identifiable goals and assessment of those goals.

Primary themes for the QEP

Per our SACSCOC QEP timeline, the QEP Steering Committee has been meeting this academic year, looking at data, and gathering feedback from the University community. These three areas have emerged as the primary ones of interest based upon data collected. One of these themes must be incorporated in the proposal.

- Communication
- Experiential Learning/Real-World Application of Learning
- Quantitative Skills

Sub-themes for the QEP proposal

The following sub-themes may be included as part of the plan; this list is not exhaustive; others may be employed.

- Critical thinking skills
- Research and scholarship
- Community Engagement
- Information literacy
- Student support and supplemental instruction



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QEP Proposal

Title of QEP

Name (s) of proposal team

Departments involved in implementation *(Departments/Units must be consulted if they are included in this plan)*

Brief summary of proposed QEP: *(100 words or fewer)*

Relationship to University Mission and Theme(s) *(200 words maximum)*

What are expected student learning outcomes?

What are proposed strategies for implementation?

How will student learning outcomes be measured?

Which students will be the focus of this plan? How many will be affected?

Equipment needed:

Staff or faculty needed to implement plan:

Approximate budget for plan:

Expenditure type	Amount	Explanation
	Total	

Timeline for implementation—starting date for new QEP August, 2017

Additional information:

Evaluation of proposals: QEP plans will be evaluated with the attached rubric. During the review process, the QEP Committee may ask for revisions of plans that show promise but are deficient in some element, so please be prepared to revised your plan if asked for more information.



Appendix 4 - Rubric QEP Proposal

Indicator	Proposal Section(s)	Unacceptable (1)	Weak (2)	Acceptable (3)	Exceptional (4)
Clear description of how student learning is directly impacted by this plan	Proposal Rationale; Assessment Plan	There is no clear indication that student learning will be impacted by this plan.	How student learning is impacted by this plan needs to be more clearly delineated.	Outcomes generally impact student learning.	Student learning is directly impacted by this plan.
Clear explanation for which program(s), area(s) or set(s) of students will be impacted	Proposal Rationale	There is no clear identification of which program(s), area(s), or set(s) of students impacted.	Some program(s), area(s), or set(s) of students impacted is included, but it is unclear as to the impact.	Program(s), area(s), or set(s) of students impacted is included, but not clearly linked to the assessment.	There is a clear explanation as to which program(s), area(s), or set(s) of students are impacted and linked to the assessment.
Clear description of how the principal theme and subthemes relate to the proposal	Relationship to Themes and Subthemes	No clear theme or subthemes have been identified.	A theme and/or subthemes have been identified, but it is unclear how this plan relates to it.	A theme and/or subthemes have been identified, but there needs to be clarification of the plan's relationship to it.	A theme and subthemes have been identified, and it is clear exactly how this plan relates to them.
Clear description of plan's alignment with NSU mission of education, research, and service	Relationship to NSU Mission and Initiatives	Plan neither aligns with nor enhances the NSU mission as it relates to student learning.	Plan aligns with the NSU mission but does not enhance the mission as it relates to student learning.	Plan aligns to NSU mission and somewhat enhances the mission as it relates to student learning.	Plan clearly aligns with and enhances the NSU mission as it relates to student learning.
Clear description of plan's alignment with Transition Forward and/or other initiatives related to student learning	Relationship to NSU Mission and Initiatives	Plan does not clearly align with Transition Forward or with any other initiatives related to student learning.	Plan aligns with Transition Forward or with other initiatives but does not clearly relate to student learning.	Plan aligns with Transition Forward related to student learning initiatives, but it does not clearly align with other initiatives related to student learning.	Plan clearly aligns with Transition Forward and other initiatives related to student learning.
Clear description of appropriate student learning outcomes, assessment methods, and direct measures of outcomes	Assessment Plan	Assessment plan is not present, or it is not clear in determining expected outcomes and means of assessment.	Assessment plan is present; outcomes are often processes that are to be implemented. Assessment of goals is not directly related to outcomes.	Assessment plan is based on clear outcomes; assessment methods are related to outcomes.	Assessment is based on clear outcomes; assessment methods are related to outcomes, and are direct measures of those outcomes. Written and oral communications student learning outcomes is based on clear outcomes; assessment methods are related to outcomes and are direct measures of those outcomes.



Indicator	Proposal Section(s)	Unacceptable (1)	Weak (2)	Acceptable (3)	Exceptional (4)
Clear description of other goals not directly related to student learning	Assessment Plan	Assessment plan is not present, or it is not clear in describing other non-SLO goals.	Assessment plan present; outcomes are often processes that are to be implemented. Assessment of goals is not directly related to outcomes.	Assessment plan is based on clear outcomes; assessment methods are related to outcomes.	Assessment is based on clear outcomes; assessment methods are related to outcomes and are direct measures of those outcomes.
Clear description of the steps needed for implementing the plan	Timeline for Implementation	Timeline for development is not present.	Timeline for development is present, but difficult to follow.	Timeline for development is present and clear enough to determine viability, but more detail is needed.	Timeline for development is present and clear enough to direct development.
Clearly describes the resources needed to implement the plan	Resources Needed; QEP Proposal Budget Worksheet	Resource areas needed are not present or inadequately addressed.	Not all areas of resources needed are addressed.	All resource areas are addressed but clarification is needed in some areas.	All resource areas are addressed, and sufficient information is given for clarification.
Provides a complete and detailed list of references	Assessment Plan	Assessment plan is not present, or it is not clear in determining expected outcomes and means of assessment.	Assessment plan is present; outcomes are often processes that are to be implemented. Assessment of goals is not directly related to outcomes.	Assessment plan is based on clear outcomes; assessment methods are related to outcomes.	Assessment is based on clear outcomes; assessment methods are related to outcomes, and are direct measures of those outcomes.

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ⁱ Some portions of the rubric are directly derived or modified from SACSCOC Quality Enhancement Plan Guideline 2012.

Appendix 5 - High Impact Practices at NSU

High-Impact Practices Used in Academic Program Curricula

Fall 2016

Program	Undergraduate Research	Capstone Courses	Internships
Accounting		Yes	
Addiction Studies		Yes	
Allied Health		Yes	Yes
Biology		Yes	
Business Administration		Yes	
Computer Information Systems		Yes	
Communication		Yes	Yes
Criminal Justice	Yes	Yes	Yes
English	Yes		
Engineering Technology Industrial Technology		Yes	
Family and Consumer Sciences	Yes	Yes	
Fine Arts	Yes	Yes	
General Studies		Yes	
Health and Exercise Science	Yes	Yes	Yes
History	Yes	Yes	
Hospital Management & Tourism		Yes	Yes
K-12 Teaching	Yes	Yes	Yes
Music	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nursing		Yes	Yes
Physical Science			
Psychology		Yes	
Scholars' College	Yes	Yes	
Social Work		Yes	Yes
Theater - Dance		Yes	

Summary

1. All programs reported Capstone Course curriculum component, with the exception of Physical Science and English.
2. Nine programs reported Undergraduate Research curriculum component.
3. Ten programs reported Internships curriculum component.
4. Four programs reported implementation of **all three** high-impact practices.