Unity in Diversity: Building Connections Between Students, the University Experience, and Global Citizenship

Proposal for an East Carolina University Quality Enhancement Plan

Note: this white paper is a proposal for a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). It is not a short version of a QEP. That is, it is a plan for creating a QEP, not a mini-QEP.

Part One-Working assumptions: The following background assumptions are operative in preparing this QEP proposal: An enhancement of significant student learning will occur as a direct impact of a successful implementation of the QEP. The increase in students’ knowledge and skills brought about by the implementation of the QEP will enable students to improve the quality of their lives throughout their lives. The QEP will identify and call for the implementation of strategic directions and goals from ECU’s Strategic Action Plan. The QEP will identify and call for the implementation of goals from ECU’s Phase II response to UNC-Tomorrow. The QEP will maximize the use of ECU faculty expertise. The QEP will minimize costs. The QEP will involve all undergraduate students from the freshman year through graduation. The QEP will involve the Foundations curriculum. The QEP will involve all academic disciplinary and interdisciplinary majors. The QEP will provide faculty in all programs with the opportunity to be involved and will require the involvement of faculty across disciplines. The QEP will require significant learning outside the classroom. The QEP will utilize in key roles the staff and activities of Student Affairs. The educational objectives addressed by the QEP will be both significant and of a sort that it is realistic to address in an undergraduate curriculum. The potential benefit of the recommended quality enhancements to student learning will be obvious to educated critics. It will be reasonable to expect that the implementation of the QEP will be successful in times of limited resources. The student learning outcomes identified by the QEP will be capable of the kind of assessment that can be used to generate further quality enhancement. The implementation of the QEP will allow for maximal flexibility in responding to
unexpected change.

**Part Two - Theme:** The theme of this QEP proposal is **Unity in Diversity: Building Connections Between Students, the University Experience and Global Citizenship.**

It is proposed that the following critical educational issues are the most compelling student learning concerns *that are consistent with the working assumptions listed above.* It is proposed that these issues provide the best all-around starting point for an ECU QEP that will be developed during the 2011-2012 academic year, presented to SACS in January 2013 and implemented thereafter:

1. Students do not understand the important, underlying connections between the disciplinary, interdisciplinary, curricular and extra-curricular aspects of their educational experiences on and off campus. Hence, students do not “get” the “big picture.”

2. There are many health and educational needs of diverse populations that could be addressed by helping students to develop their understanding of health. This is necessary to enabling ECU students to engage in health leadership through partnerships between ECU’s Academic units, Office of Student Affairs and constituents of the local and global community.

2. Students do not understand the significance of the arts and of intellectual activity generally to the quality of their lives and to the life of society.

4. Students must be able to critically reflect on the artistic, ethical, economic, therapeutic and other key practices and values that define complex cultures in the United States and globally in order to become an active participant in our democratic society.
A planning direction that has the potential to meet the requirements listed above focuses on developing a QEP that stresses “connectedness” between globally informed intellectual, artistic and health-focused events (cultural events, for short) and ECU courses that fulfill Foundations (general education) requirements and capstone courses in each student’s major. The integration of extra-curricular cultural events into the academic curriculum would be overseen by faculty and staff from Academic Affairs, Health Sciences, the Research division and Student affairs. This approach to learning celebrates unity in diversity.

The proposed QEP calls for establishing Foundations requirements that involve the faculty, students, and staff in active participation in on-and-off campus cultural events. Just as one possibility, “active participation” can mean that students would, as a graded course requirement, engage in an organized discussion of the cultural event while in attendance and would afterwards produce written critiques of the activity according to criteria appropriate to the type of event (potentially anything from a health-orientated presentation to a musical performance to a talk on the use of statistics and everything in between). These critical assessments would later be discussed and turned in for evaluation in linked courses earning Foundations credit or in an upper-division course required by a major. A QEP focused by an aim to produce a stronger sense of connectedness, of unity in diversity, has broad potential.

**Part Three – Expectations:** Addressing these critical student learning issues requires taking action in a number of areas. It is suggested that the QEP should describe a process by which ECU will:

Connect faculty and students and staff across disciplines in participation in out-of-class artistic, intellectual and health events that directly tie to student learning outcomes in Foundations courses and courses in each student’s major.
Be open-ended, in having no inherent limitation on the specific student learning outcomes it can seek to address under its unifying concept, including global readiness, ethical development, teamwork, leadership, diversity, critical thinking, global health initiatives, financial wellness, internationalization, and so on.

Establish interdisciplinary linkages/partnerships among ECU Colleges, Schools and Departments, to address the artistic, intellectual and health needs of culturally diverse populations locally, regionally, nationally and globally.

Integrate cultural and global learning outcomes in the Foundations curriculum and throughout the academic majors.

Integrate global leadership learning outcomes in the Foundations curriculum and throughout the academic majors.

Integrate a systems perspective (see, for example, Arlene M. Putt, General Systems Theory Applied to Nursing) to promote quality enhancement of student learning in the Foundations curriculum and the academic majors. Systems theory provides a tool for identifying the key parts of an integrated whole, identifying relevant relationships between these parts, establishing how parts interact and how the interactions impact specific qualitative characteristics of the whole (the system).

Note that the each of the above principles addresses educational goals emphasized in the UNC-Tomorrow report and in ECU’s current Strategic Action Plan. Thus a QEP that is developed along these lines will address learning outcomes implied by the goals stated in these plans. SACS requires that a QEP jointly involve faculty, staff and students – this involvement is central to this QEP.
**Part Four – Significance and Urgency:** Currently, our students’ grasp of their own culture is shaped by factors that have little or nothing to do with the arts, intellectual activities, an understanding of what constitutes a healthy human being or knowledge of the direct connection between these things and the quality of their lives. Our students and our society benefit when students participate critically in cultural events that develop their grasp of the local and global significance of the arts, intellectual inquiry and health. Developing a critical understanding of the underlying unity (connectedness) of these invaluable dimensions of culture is critical to the quality of our students’ lives and of our democratic society.

**Part Five – Requirements:**

*Culture Experience:* It is recommended that the QEP require that throughout each academic year all ECU students attend a variety of particular cultural events and (immediately after the event) participate in a structured critique. As noted above, these events would be linked to specific Foundations courses and courses in each student’s major. For class credit, students would learn to make reasoned, critical assessments of their cultural experiences.

By way of example of what is possible, an electronic "Culture Card" or “Passport” can be used to track each student’s attendance at cultural events. On-line electronic student portfolios containing students’ critical reflections on cultural events is another example of how this approach can be developed for this QEP.

The domain of cultural events would include all such events currently being scheduled on and off campus under the supervision of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Health Sciences and the Research Division. It also would include new events in under-represented areas as funding permits. However, it is believed that a great deal can be accomplished using the existing kinds of artistic and intellectual events regularly
supervised by Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Health Sciences and the Research division.

It is recommended that the Global Understanding Initiatives to which ECU committed in its ECU UNC-Tomorrow Phase II response be included as a part of the QEP. The specific QEP recommendations that address integrating cultural and global learning in the Foundations curriculum and throughout the academic majors are as follows:

**ECU Global Academic Initiative** (UNCT Nos. 4.1, 4.2, 5.7). This initiative currently creates technology-based global activities including live, real-time in-class interactions between students in universities in different countries (communicating with live video via the internet), virtual lectures, and collaborative research. The Global Academic Initiative involves offering introductory Global Understanding courses as part of ECU’s Foundations curriculum. For the QEP, it is recommended that the Global Understanding courses be expanded to all disciplines teaching Foundations courses. It is recommended that the students in ECU and participating foreign university classes engage in real-time experiences of on-line global cultural events. These experiences would be followed by a shared critical discussion of the cultural experience by all participating students. This enables the implementation of this aspect of the QEP without the need for significant additional resources.

**Globalizing (Internationalizing) ECU** (UNCT Nos. 4.1, 5.2) Promote global awareness through the ECU Curriculum. 1. Partner with departments and colleges in order to broaden ECU's course offerings in international interdisciplinary programs. 2. Partner with departments and colleges in order to expand opportunities for students to learn foreign languages and their related cultures. 3. Partner with departments and colleges in order to increase the overall number of internationally-related courses. 4. Partner with the Thomas Harriot College of Arts & Sciences to explore ways to increase and strengthen the programs and concentrations within International Studies, both at
the undergraduate and graduate levels.

**Campus Collaborative for an International Presence:** ECU will increase the international presence on campus via Foreign lecturers and foreign film series, new diversity initiatives and workshops, Global understanding and problems workshops, positive interaction between local and foreign students and faculty and collaborative, multinational programming and interactive activities sponsored by Campus Living, Student Experiences and the Cultural Center (Global Evidence-based learning Community, World Community Day and Diversity Week).

**Global Foundations Courses:** The ECU Foundations program will require a minimum of nine semester hours (at least three courses) of globally oriented courses. The definition of “Global” shall be that supplied by the Office of the Associate Provost for Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research in consultation with the Office of International Affairs, the Academic Standards committee, the Faculty Senate and the Chancellor. The recommendation for the QEP is that each global course be linked to out-of-class cultural events as previously described. This enables the implementation of this aspect of the QEP without the need for significant additional resources.

**Global Courses in the Major:** Departments and schools will define and implement curriculum enhancements to existing courses or will create new courses in each major as necessary to provide all ECU graduates with the *discipline-specific* education essential to global readiness in the major. The recommendation for the QEP is that each global course in the major be linked to out-of-class cultural events as previously described. Since this approach does not increase the number of courses offered or required, this enables the implementation of this aspect of the QEP without the need for significant additional resources.
Foreign Language Enhancement: The QEP should address providing support for the expansion of foreign language education at ECU generally and especially in BS degree programs where this will enhance global cultural competitiveness (communications, for example). This proposal maintains that student participation in local and global on-and-off campus cultural events, followed by in-class structured critical review, is necessary to the long-term quality of every student’s life. Foreign language competency is an essential component in developing the ability of each student to fully experience and knowledgably critique the diverse cultural events that this QEP proposal requires be made a central part of each ECU students’ educational experience. Significant qualitative dimensions of these cultural events can be appreciated fully only by students who possess sufficient fluency in a second language. In addition to calling for an increase in the number of majors requiring a foreign language, the QEP should identify languages that are not being taught at ECU that need to be added to ECU’s current offerings in order for ECU to fulfill its commitment to graduating students who are prepared to engage in global leadership. The QEP also should aim to increase the number of students who add a foreign language major or minor to their first degree.

Systems Theory: It is recommended that the QEP provide an in-depth explanation of the version of the “systems theory” approach being taken by the plan and describe a process for applying this approach in structuring the previously described in and out-of-class local and global student cultural experiences.

Rational Critical Reflection: The recommended QEP requires class-linked participation in on and off campus intellectual and artistic events. Participation includes having students engage in structured, guided (by the course instructor), verbal critical reflection during the event (or in scheduled break-out sessions immediately afterwards) and structured, guided, written critical reflection that becomes part of the material contributing to the student’s grade in a course. Written reflective responses can serve as a basis for in-class critical discussions of the out-of-class intellectual, artistic or health
event. The recommended QEP will require students to learn how to engage in rational critical reflection on the cultural events they attend.

It is suggested that the QEP develop a campus-wide critical thinking initiative. This initiative would draw campus-wide from faculty in all disciplines, Student Affairs staff and students to develop the information base necessary to create eight critical thinking training modules, implementation procedures, assessment procedures and quality-enhancement procedures. A workgroup made up of representatives of the broader campus community would be led by experts in critical thinking instruction. The workgroup would contain experts in general critical thinking skills instruction, experts in areas that have distinct reasoning methods appropriate to undergraduate education, experts in the broader out-of-class dimension of student experience, individuals with expertise in state-of-the-art online instructional technology and individuals with expertise in the artistic and communicative dimensions of graphic and video production for online delivery.

This initiative would deliver on-line, self-paced instruction in critical thinking skills to all ECU undergraduates for the normal eight-semesters of their undergraduate career, one module per semester. It would utilize the rapidly evolving state-of-the art internet-based technology that captivates contemporary undergraduates in their online extra-curricular lives. It would be indefinitely flexible, expandable and upgradable. It could be used with conventional in-class instruction, current internet-based distance-education instruction, other forms of distance education and with ECU’s ground-breaking international Global Classroom. It would involve creating eight levels of progressive instructional modules. These modules correspond to the freshman through senior semester structure of undergraduate education. Lower-division instruction would be general. Upper division instruction would be discipline specific. Hence the first level of basic critical thinking skills instruction would address the needs of first-semester freshmen, the second level second semester freshmen, and so on, with second-semester seniors receiving the most advanced and discipline-specific instruction. The
critical thinking skills covered would include: deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, abductive reasoning, informal fallacies, the use of statistics and discipline-specific reasoning (reasoning grounded in a research method). At all stages in a student’s progress, student learning outcomes would be identified and assessed, with quality enhancement a standard step in the ongoing evolution of the instructional modules. Critical thinking modules would be attached to lower-division foundations courses and upper-division courses in the major. Since the modules are self-paced, the instructor of a lower or upper division course with a critical thinking module attached would not teach the material. Grading of each student would be done by the software. Learning challenges and other issues would be addressed by the faculty workgroup overseeing this initiative.

Part Six – Assessment: It is recommended that there be multiple levels of assessment. At the bottom level, ECU’s current ongoing assessment process will generate reports and responses to the variety of learning actions being recommended as components of the QEP. In addition, QEP specific assessment must address learning outcomes, the effectiveness of each QEP element (student participation in critical discussions of cultural events, for example), and assessment of the overall results of the implementation of the QEP. It is recommended that a wide diversity of assessment methods and tools be presented as a key component of the QEP. These methods and tools should range from materials created on campus by specific disciplines, staff groups, and so on, to methods and tools developed for use at the national level. The QEP must make it clear that the ultimate aim of assessment is the enhancement of student learning. It is recommended that the detailed assessment plan be structure according to the current assessment structure and process that is being guided by IPAR.

Impact and Accountability Metrics: Evidence-based learning outcomes assessment will be used to establish competency baselines for a representative sample of ECU entering freshmen and seniors. Results of assessment of quality enhancement actions will be used to determine the impact on student learning and the enhancement of student
learning. Curriculum and pedagogical changes will be made on an ongoing basis as required to achieve continuous improvement of targeted learning outcomes as set forth in the QEP. The Office of the Associate Provost for Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research shall oversee the assessment and quality enhancement activities, and will report to the Provost on progress made during the implementation of the QEP.

**Part Seven-Schedule:** It is recommended that the QEP schedule be developed using the academic year model. The schedule should identify deadlines for all major steps in the plan. The schedule should allow for maximal flexibility in light of an ongoing, uncertain budgetary situation. The schedule for development and implementation is not presented here since the creation of this schedule must conform to the constraints placed on the university during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 academic years by the as yet undetermined amount of significant budget cuts ECU will have to make for each of those years.

**Part Eight-Management:** Responsibility for direct management of the implementation of the QEP: It is recommended that the QEP call for establishing a Faculty Senate committee containing elected faculty members and key members of the ECU administration representing each division and IPAR. The faculty member who chairs the QEP implementation committee would receive 100% reassigned time for other duties.

**Part Nine-Support:** It is recommended that the QEP explicitly identify means by which a critical number of instructional faculty, Student Affairs staff, faculty engaged in the curriculum development process, faculty responsible for the major requirements in their discipline and faculty responsible for managing the Foundations curriculum and requirements be motivated to actively support the implementation of the QEP. This is particularly challenging given the reduction in resources that are expected to be available and the likely increase in teaching loads in some Colleges due to the budget situation.