QEP Update: The University of Kentucky Selects Topic!

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Multimodal Communication Across (X) the Curriculum (MCXC)

As the University of Kentucky continues to prepare for its SACS reaffirmation of accreditation review, we again welcome the opportunity to provide an update on where we are in the QEP process and alert you to the next steps we will be taking in the months to come. For those who may be hearing about the QEP for the first time, we’ll start by briefly describing what a QEP is and how it relates to the reaffirmation of accreditation process. Then, we’ll highlight the actions taken thus far at UK to select MCXC as our QEP topic. Then we’ll explain what MCXC stands for, as well as preview what will be happening between now and January 2013, which is when our QEP is due to SACS for approval.

What is a QEP?

QEP stands for Quality Enhancement Plan, which is a core requirement for gaining reaffirmation of accreditation from SACS, our regional accrediting board. A QEP is essentially a 100-page document outlining UK’s proposal for implementing a campus-wide initiative designed to enhance student learning or the environment for student learning across campus. To gain SACS approval, we must be able to demonstrate to SACS that our QEP Topic:

- emerged from broad-based input across our stakeholder groups (e.g., students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni),
- will impact and/or involve a large number of students and faculty, and
- is feasible to implement successfully in terms of human and financial resources.

Our plan is due to SACS by January 2013. If SACS does not approve our QEP (including the process we underwent to select a topic and develop the plan), we will not earn our reaffirmation of accreditation. So, quite frankly, it’s a big deal!

What have we done so far?

We began by forming a QEP Pre-Planning Team in the Fall of 2009. The goal of the QEP Pre-Planning Team was to prepare a QEP Topic Selection and Planning Process and Timeline. Based on what we learned from a SACS liaison and from neighboring institutions who had been through the process already, we proposed a process consisting of four teams and a timeline that could ensure systematic, transparent, and broad-based involvement from all areas of campus and complete our QEP in time for the January 2013 SACS deadline. The teams and their goals are:

1. QEP Pre-Planning Team: Prepare Process and Timeline (which was approved by the University Senate in December 2009)
2. QEP Topic Selection Team: Solicit topic ideas from broad-based constituencies and, ultimately, forward three potential topics to the SACS Leadership Team. The SACS Leadership Team is comprised of UK administrators who are ultimately responsible for preparing all documents and procedures for the entire reaffirmation of accreditation process (of which the QEP is only one part). (The MCXC topic was approved by the University Senate in March 2011.)
3. QEP Topic Development Team: Create the 100-page Quality Enhancement Plan document for SACS. Due: January 2013
4. QEP Implementation Team: Implement the plan for five years following acceptance by SACS and prepare an assessment report detailing its success in improving student learning or the environment for student learning in a way that becomes a sustainable part of the campus culture.

So the work of the Pre-Planning Team and the Topic

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Selection Team is now complete. A Topic Development Team has been named and will begin working in May 2011 to vet the topic that was broadly conceived in a 8-10 page white paper to prepare a comprehensive QEP to infuse multimodal communication across the curriculum of our entire UK campus.

What is MCXC?

Although the Topic Development Team will be honing the plan over the course of the next year, we can say for certain that the proposed MCXC program addresses the plea of employers of college graduates nationwide to be better prepared in various communication skills (i.e., written, public speaking, listening, teamwork, interpersonal) across different modalities (face-to-face, online). This particular QEP topic is feasible for this time at UK for several reasons. For one, the current Graduation Writing Requirement (GWR) is being transformed from an academic research paper that may or may not be completed in a course in a student’s major or even relevant to a student’s major into a Communication Requirement in the Major (CRM), which will be an assignment or series of assignments that address the particular kinds of communication skills that employers in professions directly related to a student’s major would expect of them. Funding this topic for our QEP helps ensure that such a requirement is not an unfunded mandate. Another important reason has to do with the intention in our Design Principles for General Education that there will be some vertical integration of general education into a student’s major. The CRM, which the MCXC program will address, will do exactly that. It will take the multimodal skills students learned in their first year Composition and Communication courses and move into their majors for further refinement. MCXC program will offer:

For faculty: consultants made up of faculty and graduate students who will work with them to develop instructional modules, assignments, grading rubrics, and assessment methods.

For graduate students: an opportunity to work with consultants from MCXC and faculty in their programs to implement and assess the CRM successfully

For upper division undergraduate students: an opportunity to apply for internships to work in MCXC labs/studios to help other students as mentors complete and refine their communication projects and to get help themselves in the labs as their work on their own projects

For first-year students: mentoring and tutoring assistance in studios/labs across campus to hone their oral, written, and visual communication skills, as well as make a connection with upperclass students who can help them acculturate successfully to college life

This is a brief conceptual vision of the MCXC. What we are excited about is seeing what it transforms into more specifically as the QEP Development Team gets down to work!

What ARE the next steps?

Between now and January 2013, you can expect to be visited by members of the QEP Development Team as we seek your input about what students need to learn better than they do now to prepare them most successfully in terms of communication skills in various professions your programs prepare them for. You can also expect to be hearing a lot more about the MCXC QEP in terms of Public Relations and student organization involvement and competitions. And you can expect to see drafts of the QEP and requests for feedback about it as continue to develop and refine it in the coming months. Our goal is to get the whole campus excited and involved in some way with this great idea for improving student learning at the University of Kentucky!

Do you have more questions?

If so, we invite you to visit our website for lots more information. You can find it by logging on to: www.uky.edu/SACS and click on the QEP link. Check the QEP website often for updates!

As always, we welcome you input, questions, and ideas. Please feel free to contact either of us. Also, we hope you will invite us to an upcoming meeting of your unit(s) so we can visit more with your faculty and staff about how you can get involved in this exciting endeavor.