

CR2.12 Expanding Student Horizons through Real World Connections (QEP)

- GOALS: 1) Students will enhance their traditionally acquired knowledge through participation in a supervised experiential learning activity.
2) Students will enhance their awareness of their own values

Following approval by the SACS on-site accreditation team the QEP was launched in Fall 2007 with the naming of a QEP Coordinator. The QEP coordinator joined and attended the annual meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education. The Coordinator created a computer web form for faculty applications, student and faculty assessments. Responsibility for approving faculty grant applications for experiential learning activities was given to the Accreditation Committee, made up of deans and chairs from across campus and a faculty representative. The first round of grants were solicited and awarded in the fall of 2007 in the amount as shown in the table below. Each semester since we have awarded grants with the annual amount available increasing on a regular basis and demonstrating institutional commitment to the program. We have to date funded 340 grants to different faculty for different experiential activities. The available funds demonstrate the commitment of the university to this initiative.

term	# of grants awarded	# of students involved	Grants Awarded Dollars
2012-2013	73	935	\$ 268,980
2011-2012	67	634	\$ 176,561
2010-2011	66	883	\$ 287,655
2009-2010	61	805	\$ 164,226
2008-2009	33	883	\$ 132,508
2007-2008	40	636	\$ 135,242
total	340	3196	\$ 1,165,171

The Accreditation committee working with the QEP Coordinator has established and continually revised procedures and guidelines for the awarding of grants to faculty to encourage experiential learning activities. These procedures and policies are then placed on the QEP web page under application instructions. The program was immediately very

popular with the revisions sometimes relating to stretching the money. For example, based on feedback from faculty the committee voted to not pay for students meals during travel to allow for more grants. Similarly new rules eliminated stipends to faculty for course development and minimized faculty travel reimbursement to assure that more funds went to students.

In accordance with best practices, the Accreditation Committee followed the recommendation of the Coordinator to require all grant applicants to address Preparedness, Selection, Authenticity and Reflection. These criteria assure that students are fairly and transparently selected and that the activities truly relate to skills learned in academic coursework. Every department on campus has taken part in experiential learning activities funded by the QEP.

In 2012 due to the success of the QEP it was renamed as the REAL (Ready to Experience Applied Learning) Program and made a permanent part of the university. The university has twice been awarded the annual Service Learning Award by the Commission on Higher Learning for the state of South Carolina.

The REAL program pervades campus life. Because all departments and a significant proportion of the faculty have been involved virtually everyone is aware of this REAL program events. Experiential learning opportunities provide motivation and incentives for students. Academic performance improves as students work to qualify to take part and taking part provides rewards

for those who have applied themselves. Some activities, especially in the area of fine arts, involve bringing accomplished professional to campus to work with the REAL students. In addition to giving art and music majors direct access to accomplished artists and a view into the practicalities of such a career, the visiting artists also make presentations open at no charge to the campus and general public. One professor talked of the value of having visiting artists presentations to which introductory students could attend as a class requirement and the enthusiastic evaluations returned by those students who were not officially involved in the REAL activity. This multiplier effect is commonly seen as students discuss the activities and take part directly or indirectly.

One indication of the popularity and impact of the QEP on campus is that it is always mentioned in recruitment of faculty and students. QEP activities were featured in the university alumni magazine and are regularly described in local news.

In response to the recommendations of the SACS On-Site Committee, Francis Marion University established specific measurable goals and identified procedures to implement and assess those measurable goals. Five of these procedures involve explicit goals based on quantitative data. In addition, we have followed the recommendation by committee members for a qualitative analysis of student responses. **These assessments are discussed below with the original wording from the SACS document in bold text.**

1. “Percentage of graduating seniors participating in non-traditional learning experiences. By the end of 2009-2010, year two of the QEP, 50% of the graduating seniors will have participated in a non-traditional learning experience at Francis Marion University. By the end of 2012-2013, year five of the QEP, 65% of graduating seniors will have participated in a non-traditional learning experience.

Assessment: We will measure the percent of graduating seniors who have taken part in a non-traditional learning experience at Francis Marion University. We will achieve a goal of 50% after two years and a goal of 65% at the end of five years. We will measure participation through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data for seniors.” (CR 2.12 Recommendation 6)

The results in Table 2 show that we met our goal of 50% the second year and 65% at year five for participation in at least one QEP activity.

Table 2 NSSE sample SENIOR participants by QEP activity						
	2011/2012	2010/2011	2009/2010	2008/2009	2007/2008	2006/2007
Internship/Service Learning						
Participated	63%	73%	57%	61%	60%	54%
Research with Faculty						
Participated	19%	24%	15%	20%	26%	11%
Study Abroad						
Participated	3%	5%	3%	6%	8%	5%
All QEP Activities						
Participated	70%	78%	62%	69%	74%	57%

2. “Measures demonstrating that students will enhance their awareness of their own values and the values of other through social interaction in a supervised nontraditional setting. We have three methods by which to measure this objective.

- i. The Student Rating Form for Nontraditional Learning Activities provides a self-report of the transformational qualities of the experience. It is filled out by students who complete an Experiential learning activity whether funded by QEP or not. Students submit this form on-line with the results being anonymous.

Assessment. At the end of each academic year (2008-2009 through 2012-2013), we will analyze the target response for students to nine questions on the Student Rating Form for Nontraditional Learning Activities. These items, relating to our goals of enhancing awareness of students’ own values and the values of others, are subject to a quantitative rating scale. Students respond on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree.” Our goal is to have the mean response be a positive rating, which is above 3 (neutral.)” (CR 2.12 Recommendation 6)

Table 3 shows that we have exceeded our goal in these questions responded to by students who have been involved in QEP activities.

Table 3 Sample of Student Assessments of the QEP											
2. While participating in this activity, I applied knowledge and/or ideas that I learned in university classes.											
	Spring 2013	Fall 2012	Spring 2012	Fall 2011	Spring 2011	Fall 2010	Spring 2010	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2008	Spring 2008
Mean	4.36	4.51	4.57	4.40	4.24	4.44	4.51	4.45	4.38	4.33	4.08
St Dev	0.98	0.78	0.79	0.89	0.97	0.84	0.76	0.73	0.87	0.83	1.22
Count	110	182	162	130	207	108	136	114	133	123	86
3. This activity caused me to discover knowledge and/or ideas beyond what I learned in university classes.											
	Spring 2013	Fall 2012	Spring 2012	Fall 2011	Spring 2011	Fall 2010	Spring 2010	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2008	Spring 2008
Mean	4.50	4.66	4.62	4.66	4.42	4.61	4.54	4.65	4.5	4.31	4.09
St Dev	0.98	0.66	0.77	0.79	0.94	0.75	0.66	0.67	0.73	0.89	1.12
Count	110	183	162	128	209	108	137	113	132	122	85
4. While participating in this activity, I interacted with individuals whose value systems differed from my own.											
	Spring 2013	Fall 2012	Spring 2012	Fall 2011	Spring 2011	Fall 2010	Spring 2010	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2008	Spring 2008
Mean	3.90	4.16	3.85	4.19	3.87	4.18	3.9	4.06	3.95	4.01	3.63
St Dev	1.06	0.92	1.15	0.98	1.03	1.05	1.07	1.04	0.94	1.02	1.28
Count	110	182	162	129	204	108	135	114	133	123	86

- ii. “A second internal measure consists of the Faculty Advisor Survey for Nontraditional Learning Activities, which is described in the QEP document. Faculty completes it on-line to report their subjective analysis of the transformational nature of Experiential Learning.

Assessment. The Faculty Advisor Survey for Nontraditional Learning Activities includes eight questions on a Likert-type scale from 1-5 with 5

indicating strongly agree. Responses to these items indicate whether or not students have demonstrated awareness of their values and those of others. Our goal is to achieve a positive mean score on these eight items” (CR 2.12 Recommendation 6)

Table 4 shows that we have exceeded our goal in these questions responded to by faculty who have been involved in QEP activities.

Table 4 Sample of Faculty Assessments of the QEP											
4. The student(s) discovered additional knowledge and/or insights.											
	Spring 2013	Fall 2012	Spring 2012	Fall 2011	Spring 2011	Fall 2010	Spring 2010	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2008	Spring 2008
Mean	4.97	4.97	5.00	4.82	4.88	4.86	4.91	4.96	4.57	4.71	4.79
StDev	0.19	0.19	0.00	0.77	0.34	0.36	0.29	0.20	1.21	0.66	0.42
Count	29.00	29.00	18.00	28.00	16.00	28.00	22.00	24.00	21.00	28.00	19.00
5. The student(s) gained enhanced knowledge specific to the subject matter of a discipline or course.											
	Spring 2013	Fall 2012	Spring 2012	Fall 2011	Spring 2011	Fall 2010	Spring 2010	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2008	Spring 2008
Mean	4.90	4.90	5.00	4.68	4.93	4.71	4.87	4.92	4.57	4.82	4.53
StDev	0.41	0.41	0.00	0.86	0.26	0.53	0.34	0.28	0.98	0.48	0.61
Count	29	29	18	28	15	28	23	24	21	28	19
6. The student(s) interacted with persons whose values and/or culture differed from their own.											
	Spring 2013	Fall 2012	Spring 2012	Fall 2011	Spring 2011	Fall 2010	Spring 2010	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2008	Spring 2008
Mean	4.76	4.76	4.67	4.64	4.50	4.36	4.52	4.61	4.14	4.25	4.26
StDev	0.58	0.58	0.77	0.87	0.63	0.78	0.73	0.94	1.20	0.93	0.99
Count	29	29	18	28	16	28	23	23	21	28	19

- iii. **“Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) provide an external assessment of our efforts to transform students’ values and enhance their understanding of others’ values. Using weighted arithmetic means, we compare students who indicate that they have had QEP experiences with those who have not. The dependent variables consist of five items found in the Educational and Personal Growth section relating to values and abilities. We believe that, with our emphasis on best practices, students having taken part in these activities will come to demonstrate, in the next five years, scores on these five items that are statistically significantly higher than those who have not participated in experiential learning activities.” (CR 2.12 Recommendation 6)**

Table 5 shows comparisons for the past three years. Students who had participated in a QEP activity scored as well as non-participants and often had a significantly higher score. In no case did the non-participant group score significantly higher than the participation group.

Table 5 NSSE Data QEP Participants versus Non-Participants									
National Survey of Student Engagement 2012									
Group Statistics		Intern		Research		Study Abroad		QEPALL	
		N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Working effectively with others	No Part	120	3.13	176	3.19	199	3.24	108	3.10
	Participate	83	3.41*	27	3.59*	4	3.25	95	3.40*
Understanding yourself	No Part	121	3.06	175	3.01	198	3.05	109	3.03
	Participate	81	3.04	27	3.33	4	3.00	93	3.08
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	No Part	121	2.79	176	2.74	199	2.81	109	2.76
	Participate	82	2.84	27	3.22*	4	2.50	94	2.86
Solving complex real-world problems	No Part	122	2.90	177	2.95	200	3.01	110	2.92
	Participate	82	3.15	27	3.33	4	2.75	94	3.10
Developing a personal code of values and ethics	No Part	121	2.86	176	2.91	199	2.97	109	2.81
	Participate	82	3.13	27	3.37*	4	2.75	94	3.16*
National Survey of Student Engagement 2011									
Group Statistics		Intern		Research		Study Abroad		QEPALL	
		N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Working effectively with others	No Part	47	3.36	79	3.32	91	3.33	44	3.34
	Participate	46	3.30	14	3.43	2	3.50	49	3.33
Understanding yourself	No Part	47	3.17	80	2.93	92	3.01	44	3.11
	Participate	48	2.85	15	3.47*	3	3.00	51	2.92
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	No Part	46	2.87	79	2.78	91	2.81	43	2.84
	Participate	48	2.79	15	3.07	3	3.33	51	2.82
Solving complex real-world problems	No Part	47	2.94	80	2.91	92	2.97	44	2.93
	Participate	48	3.00	15	3.27	3	3.00	51	3.00
Developing a personal code of values and ethics	No Part	46	2.96	79	2.96	91	2.99	43	2.95
	Participate	48	3.02	15	3.13	3	3.00	51	3.02
National Survey of Student Engagement 2010									
Group Statistics		Intern		Research		Study Abroad		QEPALL	
		N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Working effectively with others	No Part	75	3.00	102	3.20	111	3.20	70	3.00
	Participate	38	3.63 *	11	3.36	2	4.00 *	43	3.56 *
Understanding yourself	No Part	74	2.86	101	2.92	110	2.86	69	2.93
	Participate	38	2.89	11	2.45	2	3.50	43	2.76
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	No Part	74	2.65	100	2.75	109	2.70	69	2.70
	Participate	37	2.61	11	2.27	2	3.00	42	2.71
Solving complex real-world problems	No Part	74	2.86	101	2.94	110	2.90	69	2.91
	Participate	38	2.97	11	2.55	2	3.00	43	2.88
Developing a personal code of values and ethics	No Part	74	2.73	101	2.87	110	2.80	69	2.81
	Participate	38	2.97	11	2.27	2	3.00	43	2.81

* $p < .05$

3. “Comparison of FMU students to non-FMU students. Our fifth measurable goal also involves the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data. In this case we will compare our students to others on the five values questions discussed in item 5. The measurable goal is that FMU seniors who have completed a QEP activity will meet or exceed the mean scores on these items of students from our Carnegie peer institutions.” (CR 2.12 Recommendation 6)

Table 6 shows that Francis Marion students with QEP participation score as high as Carnegie peers but in only one case was there score statistically significantly higher. Thus we have met the goal of meeting or exceeding student from peer institutions.

Table 6 QEP Seniors with QEP Participation versus Seniors at Carnegie Peers			
Survey Item	National Survey of Student Engagement 2012		
		Francis Marion	Carnegie Peer
	N	Mean	Mean
Working effectively with others	49	3.40	3.22
Understanding yourself	51	3.08	2.97
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	51	2.86	2.71
Solving complex real-world problems	51	3.10	2.90
Developing a personal code of values and ethics	51	3.16	2.88
National Survey of Student Engagement 2011			
	N	Mean	Mean
Working effectively with others	49	3.33	3.23
Understanding yourself	51	2.92	2.90
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	51	2.82	2.70
Solving complex real-world problems	51	3.00	2.84
Developing a personal code of values and ethics	51	3.02	2.78
National Survey of Student Engagement 2010			
	N	Mean	Mean
Working effectively with others	43	3.56	3.23 *
Understanding yourself	43	2.79	2.97
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	42	2.71	2.73
Solving complex real-world problems	43	2.88	2.86
Developing a personal code of values and ethics	43	2.81	2.90

* $p < .05$

4. “Qualitative analysis of student responses. In addition to the quantitative measures discussed above, we will perform a qualitative analysis of open-ended student responses to ten (10) questions on the Student Rating Form for Nontraditional Learning Activities, which is described in the QEP document. These items are completed by all students who participate in non-traditional learning activities on campus, regardless of whether or not they receive QEP funding. These items are taken via an on-line quiz and the results are anonymous. Because qualitative research is exploratory, we hope to gain additional insight

into the reaction of students to experiential learning opportunities.” (CR 2.12 Recommendation 6)

Qualitative Analysis of Student Responses

The numerical analysis provided in Table 3 measures students’ approval of the QEP and certain of its goals. However, a qualitative analysis of their responses to open-ended questions is exploratory in nature and allows for a better understanding of the high approval ratings. Reading the individual responses provides a gratifying description of the myriad ways in which students benefit from the experiential learning activities. The following analysis serves as an alternative to a careful reading of the individual responses.

Content of the items from Question 10 (In addition to the developments covered above, did this activity influence your knowledge or value systems in other ways? If so, identify and discuss) of the Fall 2008 data found that most responses fit into one of four areas. These four broad areas are described below with unedited examples.

1. **The activities provided an enhanced sense of career path and goals along with skills needed for a career.** This link to the future provides an important motivational element.
 - *After going on this trip to New York City and visiting the many wonderful art galleries, I began to appreciate art a lot more. I will apply this to my future art classroom, for many students to learn from.*
 - *Attending my first psychology conference allowed me to reflect on my goals and experiences. This experience exposed me to new therapies, and strengthened my decision to become a clinical psychologist.*
 - *I believe that this field trip showed me new ways that would help me better my teaching ability and help my students more.*
 - *I had the chance to learn about wet plate collodions and how to get your work up in galleries.*
2. **The activity increased knowledge, curiosity and love of learning.** Students here seemed to go beyond our goal of enhancing their traditional knowledge to actually placing more value on that learning.
 - *As a result of the knowledge gained from this conference, I, as well as my peers who attended the conference, have formulated a research topic which we plan to begin investigating soon.*
 - *I was able to expand my knowledge of chemistry and make connections with chemistry and biology topics.*
 - *Participation in the programming contest caused me to reaffirm my goals in the Computer Science field.*
3. **The experience resulted in an improved confidence, independence and sense of self-discipline.**
 - *Greek poet Archilochus stated the fox knows many things while the hedgehog knows one great thing. Up until now, I was looking at my direction through a single lens like a hedgehog; field work and conservation. Working in this lab has given me more perspective and has given me an interest in other avenues of discovery such as genetics work and immunology to tackle problems facing our environment. I can now envision myself in an integrated approach using many different methods ranging from field work to molecular biology and now I have some experience in that area. This has been invaluable.*

- *It enhanced my desire to become a chemist and start doing beneficial research for society.*
- *This trip helped me to strengthen my social skills and networks, increased my knowledge about the way our government works, and exposed me to a plethora of various backgrounds, ideologies, and beliefs.*

4. Through contact they developed an appreciation of others' values and the world beyond. The many enthusiastic responses in this area support the notion that students are not only being exposed to other places and values but in a manner that lead them to appreciate and value the differences.

- *Being submerged in a new culture is the best way to learn about it and fully grasp someone else's life style and views. I could not learn what I did from a book or a class that was in the USA. I had self discovery and gained new understanding about politics, art, social norms, habits, and ultimately how to be comfortable going outside of my element to try doing new, foreign things on my own.*
- *I learned more about the world outside of the US and realized that we have just as many misconceptions about the world as they have about us. Also, by being able to actually see and experience things I have been and am being taught about makes it easier to understand.*
- *I saw that not every teacher has to be strict and raise their voice to keep their class under control. The behavior management in this school was amazing!*
- *This activity grealy influenced my knowledge and value systems in more ways than one. It allowed me to explore the uniqueness of different cultures while reflecting upon my own.*

The QEP established two formal goals

- 1) Students will enhance their traditionally acquired knowledge through participation in a supervised nontraditional learning activity.
- 2) Students will enhance their awareness of their own values and the values of others through social interaction in a supervised nontraditional setting.

The qualitative analysis of the student responses to the open-ended questions found considerable support for both of these goals as well two other general areas. The examples for each area come from Fall 2012.

Subjecting the entire text of all student responses to WordStat, Computer Assisted Text Analysis Software provides an additional look at the assessment. The WordStat analysis involves identifying words for each of the four categories established from the Fall 2008 responses. The program then identified synonyms based on the precise definition of the word as used in the creation of each category.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of keywords across all items and all students for two terms. It provides support for the validity of the semantic categories listed above. The categories were built from Question 10 of the Fall 2008 responses but the overall pattern is similar for all other school terms. In addition to enhancing knowledge and increasing awareness of other values, the experiential learning experiences gave students increased self-confidence and a sense of career goals and preparation.

The university has learned much from the implementation of the QEP. We learned that the faculty is a fount of creative ideas for activities that further the QEP goals. The amazing variety of

experiential learning activities created by faculty could never have occurred from a top-down process. Different disciplines put forth different activities that uniquely benefitted their students.

We also learned that faculty members, though creative and inspired, also need direction. Some suggested projects that were more about seeking funding for a pet project rather than providing experiential learning. The University Accreditation Committee (UAC) consisted of deans and chairs from the largest departments all of which are involved in accreditation processes. These experienced administrators, while still faculty members, were able to view proposals at a university level rather than just an individual or department level. The UAC provided a stewardship of funds that were essential to the success of the QEP.

The university also learned that many students will respond with enthusiasm to experiential learning activities and benefit greatly from them. Reading the qualitative responses on student evaluations makes it clear that these activities add greatly to the overall educational experience at Francis Marion University. While the QEP was able to involve 70% of students in experiential learning activities we seek to reach the less motivated or involved students. Some may only need to inspiration that QEP involvement represents to become more connected and energized.

Reading the qualitative responses leads us to conclude that the QEP provided an enormous boost to students' career transition though it was not identified as a major goal going in. Students have meaningful activities to add to their resumes, develop a clear direction in career goals and show an increased confidence in their ability to thrive in the workforce.

Figure 6 Wordstat analysis of text

