

SACS Quality Enhancement Plan  
Proposal:

**Reading and Writing Across the  
Curriculum**

Texas Southern University  
September, 2009

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## **Commit to Literacy and Reap the Rewards SACS Quality Enhancement Plan**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The National Survey of Student Engagement in its most recent NSSE publication, *Promoting Engagement for All Students: The Imperative to Look Within—2008 Results*, cites the following benchmarks of quality in educational practice:

- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environment

The report “Liberal Education and High-Impact Practices: Making Excellence—Once and for All—Inclusive” from America’s Promise (LEAP), a national incentive by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), argues that our most important national challenge in higher education is helping America’s extraordinarily diverse students reap the full benefits—economic, civic, and personal—of their studies in college. In association with NSSE, and after extensive research, LEAP has presented, “High-Impact Educational Practices” that expand the markers for college student success to include not just retention and completion, but cumulative educational achievements across the multiple levels of the college curriculum.

The twenty-first century puts specific forms of literacy at a premium: the ability to communicate effectively and persuasively with others through cross-cultural literacy; the ability to work with new forms of media through technological literacy; the ability to understand language and culture in context through historical literacy; the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively through information literacy; the ability to analyze, organize, and make sense of data through quantitative literacy; the ability to understand and meet urban and environmental challenges through social research and scientific literacy; and the ability to create expressions of form and beauty through artistic creativity.

This SACS QEP Plan, Commitment to Literacy and Critical Thinking, provides and supports at TSU an increased level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, enriched education experiences, and a supportive campus environment.

This QEP focuses on desired values and outcomes: writing and information literacy for improved learning, communication, and research; faculty-student collaboration and engagement for an increased contribution to the community and to the professions, and enriched educational experiences that expand the learning community while fostering critical and creative responses.

These themes will be translated into specific actions and programs among them, a supportive and academically challenging TSU-Tiger experience from the freshman year, active communication across programs and disciplines, and an expanded student commitment to his academic field and to the larger world beyond the campus yard.

## INTRODUCTION

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) researches colleges and universities to identify and measure meaningful quality improvement in higher education. These measures go beyond the statistical compilation of perceived quality provided in the annual rankings and even beyond most of data derived from quantified outcome assessment measurement. The most recent NSSE publication, *Promoting Engagement for All Students: The Imperative to Look Within—2008 Results*, cites the following benchmarks of quality in educational practice:

- Level of Academic Challenge
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LEAP has outline the essential learning outcomes to be

- 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
- Intellectual and Practical Skills, including
  - Inquiry and analysis
  - Critical and creative thinking
  - Written and oral communication
  - Quantitative literacy
  - Information literacy
  - Teamwork and problem solving
- 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
- Integrative and Applied Learning, including
  - Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

The Modern Language Association (MLA) White Paper (2008) concurs with the national surveys of the NSSE and emphasizes that the arts of language and the tools of literacy are key qualifications for full participation in the social, political, economic, literary, and cultural life of the twenty-first century. The MLA surveyed its higher education constituency and concluded that higher standards of literacy, multiple types of literacy, are basic requisites for achievement in the academic major fields and professions.

The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), the American Library Association, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), and the Council of Independent Colleges have in the last five years all proposed and endorsed standards for information literacy, a skill which has been shown to be a strong predictor of student success in college and the professions. Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.

The twenty-first century puts specific forms of literacy at a premium: the ability to communicate effectively and persuasively with others through cross-cultural literacy; the ability to work with new forms of media through technological literacy; the ability to understand language and culture in context through historical literacy; the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively through information literacy; the ability to analyze, organize, and make sense of data through quantitative literacy; the ability to understand and meet urban and environmental challenges through social research and scientific literacy; and the ability to create expressions of form and beauty through artistic creativity.

## **ANTECEDENTS**

At Texas Southern University, student retention and graduation rates show and the assessment process reveals what every instructor in the core curriculum knows from experience: students enter college unprepared and far too many do not develop the skills, habits, or degree of engagement necessary for success in academics. At TSU many students enter the freshman year without the arts of language and the tools of literacy required to succeed in the state mandated core curriculum. The completion rate in the first college level English courses is dismal, with a third dropping out or withdrawing before the end of the semester, and those students that compete the course still fail at an alarming rate. Fewer than half of the students enrolled in ENG 131 each semester receive a grade of C or better. Even students who manage to pass through the core courses often lack the commitment to studies to become excellent in their major fields. They fail to fully develop the reading and writing skills and the study habits needed for life-long learning; they fail to truly engage in the projects, the research, and the discovery to contribute to their major fields and to their larger communities.

Texas Southern University offers a rich history as a prominent HBCU and a legacy of brilliant artists, scientists, educators, and entrepreneurs. TSU is laudable and noteworthy in its promise to educate the underserved and to admit the underprepared. TSU boasts an internationally trained, multi-cultural faculty and staff and serves an array of multi-ethnic students possessed of energy, promise, and potential. The University's inner city campus is an integral part of a vibrant Houston urban community, and the University provides professional programs that extend the

community to the world via international academic, cultural, and international engagement in teaching and learning.

The task is then to utilize the benchmarks of quality of the National Survey of Student Engagement and the proven high-impact educational practices advocated by LEAP and the Association of American Colleges and Universities to provide and support at TSU an increased level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, enriching education experiences, and a supportive campus environment.

## **BEST PRACTICES**

This TSU QEP is based on both the best-practice research and recommendations from national institutes of higher education and on topical current advice from highly successful educators.

First of all, according to LEAP and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, achieving the goals of a liberal education involves connecting essential learning outcomes with high-impact practices. For each of the essential learning outcomes a list of proven most effective educational experiences are outlined.

Essential learning outcomes:

- Fostering Broad Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
- Strengthening Intellectual and Practical Skills
- Deepening Personal and Social Responsibility
- Practicing Integrative and Applied Learning

Each outcome is important and all outcomes must be achieved for truly successful learning however, this QEP focuses on arguably the most basic. Strengthening Intellectual and Practical Skills. The high-impact educational practices recommended to strengthen intellectual and practical skills are as follows:

- Strengthening Intellectual and Practical Skills
  - First year seminars and experiences
  - Writing intensive courses (across the curriculum)
  - Skill intensive courses (quantitative, oral communication, and information literacy across the curriculum)
  - Collaborative assignments and projects
  - Service and community-based learning

Our second source of expertise comes from “College Advice, From People Who Have Been There Awhile,” which appeared in the *New York Times* on September 6, 2009, and in which noted educators give some helpful advice to young adults entering school this fall. The advice may be summarized this way:

- Find the best teachers and take a writing class
- Cut through the jargon, analyze and debate.
- Read the authors that are difficult and demand rereading.
- Once in class, participate.

- Have passion for learning and for your beliefs.
- Think about life, not just a job.
- Read a good newspaper; it will be your path to the world at large.
- Fall in love with your vision of the future.
- College is never what one expects.

## THEMES

This task at TSU is monumental and each goal is enormously important. The focus must be on themes that encompass these goals with actions adapted to the specifics of Texas Southern University:

This QEP proposal has selected to focus on the following desired values and outcomes:

- **Supportive and academically challenging experience from freshman year**
- **Writing and information literacy for improved learning and communication**
- **Collaboration, communication, and writing across programs and disciplines**
- **Faculty-student collaboration in research and community projects**
- **Enriched educational experiences that extend and expand the learning community**
- **Expanded student professional, intercultural and international experiences**

These themes will be translated into specific actions and programs that enhance the daily experience of each student at TSU, improve student interaction with faculty and fellow students, and expand the learning community while developing individual talent and potential.

## ACTIONS

### Examples of Programs to Support the Actions

#### 1. Supportive and Academically Challenging College Experience from the Freshman Year

- College Seminars 111, 211, 311, 411, 511:** A series of informational technology/literacy workshops and/or 1-hour courses from basic course to major to graduate level designed to teach basic information technology, search strategies, data base usage, evaluation of information sources; these could become a part of College Seminar 111 (freshman), 211 (sophomore), 311(junior), 411(senior), 511(beginning graduate),
- Advising and Mentoring** campus-wide basis with the goal of ensuring that every student is assigned both an advisor and a mentor and every student will participate in projects and research to build on knowledge and experience transfer during their matriculation.
- Stretch Freshman English I - Innovative approaches to retention and success in the core curriculum:** Proposal to stretch the ENG 131 one-semester, 3 credit WRITING course, into a two-semester course with 2 credits per semester; this will extend the time

and the depth of the college courses for those students who have finished developmental courses but still test in a certain range on the ACT. This will afford more time on task, more time on the process of writing and revision

- d. **All-Course Assessment**, every course, every semester throughout the University. Currently there very limited student assessment of faculty, but there is no course assessment at all. This general course assessment can be done easily anonymously though Blackboard, once at mid-term informally for the instructor's to take immediate action, at the end of the semester for course and teacher evaluations for planning.
- e. **UNIVERSITY BOOK CLUB**: A common text or research theme to be selected by collaboration across the disciplines to discuss a book research theme or topic such as "social justice" and activities, speakers, field trips and projects to explore this topic and generate "new knowledge."
- f. **Electronic Classrooms, Library, Computer labs**: Dedicated facilities and technology will be made available to those students/faculty/TSU community persons who participate in the information/technology literacy community of engaged learners. Study carrels, electronic study rooms, and other space/resources will be designated or created for use by this community.

## 2. Collaboration, Communication, and Writing Across Programs and Discipline

- a. **TSU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OWL**: Texas Southern University English Department Online Writing Laboratory:
  - i. The TSU English Department is developing a TSU Online Writing Laboratory that will guide students and teachers through the core curricular basics in reading, writing, and language arts. This laboratory will be developed with resources already available in the English Department MTM Writing Clinic, and will be enriched and expanded to include cross-disciplinary writing skills.
  - ii. This lab is being built in Blackboard with components suitable to the various professional schools, like the School of Law, Pharmacy, Communications, Science and Technology, Arts, etc.
  - iii. The materials in this lab will be accessible to all through the TSU WEB; and to TSU students through the common LUMINUS login
- b. **Digital Storytelling Across the Curriculum**: A project of Communications/Journalism is building this personal blog, blog, portfolio or personal and family stories. These would form a rich written history and legacy of the TSU community to the world and they would be developed in an online community blog forum.
- c. **CAPSTONE and Inter-departmental courses** that would focus on the language, the codes, the iterations within each discipline; for example, The literature, art, and history of the Enlightenment/The Age of Reason/ Neo-Classicism, or of Modernism.

- d. Research and Reporting Across the Disciplines:** Based in the library, faculty research mentors and /or liaisons will conduct regular workshops and guide research activities around a common theme or topic using databases and available technology. Speakers, field trips and projects will be used to explore issues in information technology/literacy and generate "new knowledge" through the investigation of particular themes or research topics.

### **3. Expanding Professional, Intercultural and International Student Experiences**

- a. **Building student service projects** into every major field; projects would be campus based, then community, then professional and international
- b. **Improve cultural literacy through increased foreign language study:** promote workshops, courses, study abroad, and intercultural experiences within the Houston community
- c. **Increasing the opportunity for international study through development of internationally focused majors**
- d. **Expand Alumni/Student mentor-protégé interactions**

### **OUTCOMES**

1. More students currently will be more information literate
2. More students currently enrolled will have a broader information knowledge base
3. More students currently enrolled will be able to access and evaluate information
4. More students currently enrolled will know their advisor
5. More students currently enrolled will have a mentor
6. More students currently enrolled will know their major field and have a career goal
7. More students currently enrolled will have specific plans to graduate from TSU
8. More students will say that they have had discussion of ideas from their readings with faculty members outside of classes
9. More students will have participated in online writing skills improvement workshops and online or hybrid courses.
10. More students will have taken a class in their discipline in which writing is a focus and in which writing multiple drafts is encouraged
11. More students will have done community service or volunteer work on campus, in the urban community, or abroad
12. More students will have taken courses in a foreign language or culture
13. More students will have participated in campus extracurricular organizations
14. More students will have participated in study abroad programs
15. More students will have internships in professional fields through networks established on campus
16. More students will have collaborated on a study project with students not in their major field
17. More students will have participated in an "improve the campus effort" through "green." Initiatives, re-cycling, or health awareness fairs
18. More students will plan to give back to the University by a commitment to support, mentor, or guide other students.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The markers for assessment will be based on measuring the outcomes based on the goals and benchmarks of educational quality:

- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environment

**Table 1  
Comprehensive Evaluation Plan**

	<b>Course Pass Rates</b>	<b>Course-Level Assessment</b>	<b>Student Evaluations</b>	<b>Program Level Assessment</b>	<b>1 Year Retention Rates</b>	<b>Graduation Rates</b>
<b>I Writing, Cross-Discipline and Cultural Information Literacy, Commitment, and Collaboration</b>						
Library Orientation Experience	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Faculty Development Initiative/Mentoring		X		X	X	X
<b>II Student Engagement in the Classroom</b>						
Evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporate information into his or her knowledge base.		X	X	X	X	X
Portfolio Development	X	X	X	X		
<b>III Student Engagement in Research and Writing</b>						
Critical Thinking		X	X	X	X	
Concept Mapping		X	X	X		

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