

The QEP Selection Committee has identified the following four themes as possible QEPs for FGCU. Core writing teams have been identified and will be announced once selected faculty and staff respond with their willingness to serve.

Enhancing Student Learning through Technology: Technology and Pedagogy

One topic suggestion (from one of our students) was that we use the QEP to increase the number of courses that we offer in a blended (or hybrid) format. The student went on to describe benefits related to our mission (less carbon footprint) and to physical and financial constraints (offering more classes without the need for more classrooms). The committee found this idea compelling, but a bit narrow for a QEP, so we broadened the topic to include enhancing faculty use of technology in campus classes, hybrid classes, and distance learning classes. We are interested in using technology to improve pedagogy, so it is vital that we focus not on just implementing the use of more technology, but also that we measure to see if this technology use actually improves student learning (as quality is inherent in a QEP).

We expect that the proposal would include traditional on-campus classes, hybrid classes, and distance learning classes. We hope to see a focus not on the implementation of technology, but on the use of technology (which will require training faculty) and on the effect of this technology on student learning.

The most direct outcome of enhancing the technology used in classes will be improved student learning in those classes. It is likely that where student learning is improved, we will see higher student retention. We may also see secondary benefits such as those mentioned in the student's original proposal – a smaller carbon footprint (due to fewer trips to campus for students) and the ability to offer more class sections without building more classrooms.

Undergraduate Research.

The committee found the idea of a QEP focused on undergraduate scholarship, broadly-defined, compelling. All students can benefit from increased opportunities to demonstrate their learning through professional projects and presentations and to potentially “synthesize their education in original discoveries.”

The critical thinking learning goal should be incorporated, including quantitative reasoning where appropriate, and highlight other elements of the university which might include ideas such as:

- the Honor's Program
- interdisciplinarity
- sustainability and
- Civic Engagement and Service Learning.

Writing, Critical Thinking, and Literacy across the Curriculum

Two learning outcomes are at the heart of most educational programs: effective written communication skills and robust critical thinking skills. Both skills also involve a wide range of literacy skills--the ability to

read and analyze texts (textual literacy), the ability to analyze and use information (information literacy), and the ability to navigate and appropriately use technology (technological literacy).

FGCU's Writing, Critical Thinking, and Literacy Initiative will focus on developing a writing-across-the-curriculum program designed to improve student writing, critical thinking, and literacy as students progress through their studies. The initiative will build on the outstanding work currently occurring in the Composition program where students are introduced to a vocabulary specific to the development of writing skills and where students learn to assess their writing using a rubric adapted from the American Association of Colleges and Universities. The Composition program also incorporates the development of critical thinking and literacy linked to the development of writing abilities.

Two elements are at the heart of this initiative. First is the development of a robust, university-wide understanding of critical thinking and a comprehensive and coherent literacy program that could be included in the Composition program. Second is the expansion of the work completed in the Composition program relating to writing, critical thinking, and literacy across the curriculum, not only in other General Education and writing intensive courses but also in upper level courses in the majors.

The Writing, Critical Thinking, and Literacy Initiative could connect to many other student success and engagement activities at FGCU, including activities in the Writing Center and the Center for Academic Achievement, the First Year Reading Project, the First Year Resident Experience program, among others. Such an initiative might assist with retention of first year students and with student persistence as they move through their majors and to graduation. Finally, this initiative could lay the groundwork for a richer culture of teaching and learning as it would depend upon a broad, university-wide conversation about core student learning competencies.

Student Success and Engagement

Several Quality Enhancement Plan topics called for more attention to be given to student success and engagement. One proposal nicely summarized the issue at hand in relation to graduation rates:

“I propose that the QEP deal with the issue of undergraduate graduation rates at FGCU. According to IPEDS data, currently we rank at or near the bottom of the list of SUS universities in graduation rate at the 4, 6 and 8 year timeframe for undergraduates. Among the 78 universities defined as peers for faculty and presidential salary comparisons, we rank 51/76 in 4 year rate, 63/76 in 6 year rate, and 66/76 in 8 year rate. 33rd, 17th and 13th percentile respectively. In comparison to the 9 aspirational peers, we rank 7th of ten in 4 year graduation rate, and last in 6 and 8 year rates.”

In addition to data on persistence to graduation, FGCU has also tracked retention of First-Time-In-College (FTIC) students, which has ranged from 75-80% since 2003, when the university started the First Year Reading Project and First Year Convocation (both featuring James McBride and his book *The Color of Water*).

The QEP Student Success and Engagement topics highlighted several areas where FGCU could concentrate its efforts, either expanding ongoing activities or developing new approaches on the campus that have worked at other institutions. The areas suggested in the topic submissions include:

- Expand the work of the Center for Academic Achievement to emphasize innovation and FGCU's learning-centered spirit
- Expand the work of the First Year Resident Experience (FYRE), connecting this program to the General Education program and student learning
- Expand the work of Service Learning and Civic Engagement as strategies for student success and engagement
- Create an Undergraduate Space in the library
- Expand and improve academic programs relating to first year student retention, including:
 - expanding the teaching of our Effective Learning course
 - creating a strong peer mentoring program
 - starting workshops on retention that would build a community-wide culture around student success
 - expanding the Step Ahead program that focuses on math remediation and add a component for English and reading remediation
 - developing a Freshman Transition course that would assist students with academic acculturation (this might include intercultural engagement, preparation for civic engagement, and preparation for participation in a variety of communities)
 - expanding the work of key FTIC courses such as the Freshman Humanities Seminar.

Developing a comprehensive and interconnected student success and engagement initiative at FGCU that begins with our marketing and recruitment, moves through our admissions process, and then through all four years of undergraduate study would allow FGCU to advance student learning of university-wide student learning outcomes and to emphasize key attributes of our mission, including civic engagement/service learning and environmental sustainability.