

Accreditation and the First-Year Experience

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Education Commission of the States

Principles of Good Practices

Quality begins with an organizational culture that values:

- *High expectations*
- *Respect for diverse talents and learning styles*
- *Emphasis on the early years of study*

A quality curriculum requires:

- *Coherence in learning- curriculum structured such that sequenced courses reinforce specific outcomes*
- *Synthesizing experiences*
- *Ongoing practice of learned skills and knowledge*
- *Integrating education and experience*

Quality instruction builds in:

- *Active learning*
- *Assessment and prompt feedback*
- *Collaboration*
- *Adequate time on task*
- *Out-of-class contact with faculty*

Principles of Good Practice Don't Necessarily Affect Accreditation Processes

“Identifying issues and acting on them are two different matters.”

Using the Accreditation Visit to Benefit the Institution

Council of Higher Education Accreditation, Presidential Guidelines Series, Vol 5, April, 2007

- Campus-generated initiatives are often more involving and long-lasting than requirements imposed by outside accrediting agencies.
- Outside agencies can, however, *require* an involving campus initiative as part of the accreditation process.

Major regional accreditation organizations in the United States with a focus on campus-generated initiatives:

- North Central Association of Colleges & Schools
Higher Learning Commission
- Southern Association of Colleges & Schools
(SACS)

North Central Association – Higher Learning Commission

- AQIP – Academic Quality Improvement Program
(Continuous improvement)
- PEAQ – Program to Evaluate and Advance
Quality

AQIP Institutions with FYE initiatives:

- Principia College – Freshman Curriculum Development
- Ohio University – Improve Expectations and Attitudes of First-Year Students Regarding Active Educational Engagement
- Inver Hills Community College – COMPASS = Community of Mentors, Peers and Successful Students

PEAQ offers a “customized self study for long-term members” through the Policy Center for the First-Year of College’s Foundations of Excellence Program. This option has been available since 2008.

SACS –
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

QEP – Quality Enhancement Plan

“The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue directly related to student learning.” SACS Resource Manual, 21.

Recent SACS Quality Enhancement Plans using First-Year Experience:

- Austin Peay State University

“Enhancing Student Retention and Services: First-Year Seminar, Advising, and Student Life”

- The Citadel

“Improving the Academic Performance, Development of Principled Leadership, and Physical Effectiveness of Fourth Class Cadets (Freshmen) at the Citadel”

- Blue Ridge Community College

“Enriching the First-Year Experience by Building Communities of Learning”

- Collin County Community College

“Getting to the Core: Learning Communities and Student Learning Outcomes”

- **Southeastern Louisiana University**

“Strengthening Student Learning Through a New Freshmen Success Experience”

- **The University of Alabama – Tuscaloosa**

“Creating a Multidimensional Instructional Strategy for Enhancing Active and Collaborative Learning”

- **The University of Alabama – Birmingham**

“Degrees of Excellence – Reconceptualizing the Core Curriculum”

- **University of the Incarnate Word**

“Increasing Engagement in the Learning Process Among First-Time, First-Year Students for the Purpose of Improving Their Academic Progress”

- University of Memphis

“Freshman Learning Communities: Engaging the New Student”

- University of New Orleans

“First Year Initiative at the University of New Orleans: Strengthening the Foundations of Academic Success”

- Warren Wilson College

“The First-Year Experience as the Foundation for College Success”

- Wesleyan College

“Living Liberal Education: A More Intentional First-Year Experience”

○ Vanderbilt University

“Building a Bridge to the Commons: Vanderbilt Vision”

○ Christopher Newport University

“Enhancing Critical Thinking through First Year Seminars”

○ Chipola College

“Learning to Persist” (combines SI and FYE)

○ Virginia Highlands Comm’ty College

“SOAR: Strengthening Orientation, Advising and Retention”

Characteristics of Recent QEPs on the First-Year Experience

- Explore the Expectations Gap
- Emphasize Engagement (NSSE)
- Change the Focus of the Freshman Seminar
- Integrate Services
- Use DFW Data

Broadly Focused QEPs

University of Alabama – Birmingham

“Reconceptualizing UAB’s Undergraduate
Core Curriculum”

- Freshman to Senior Focus

First Efforts

University of Virginia's College at Wise

“Initiation of Freshmen into a Culture of Reading, Writing and Community”

- Common Reading
- Extended liberal arts seminar

Revisions of Current Practices

Wesleyan College
Macon, Georgia

“Living Liberal Education: A More
Intentional First-Year Experience”

- Expanded and strengthened first-year experience



GOING FURTHER FASTER: COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON'S FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

A liberal education demands a vital scholarly community where ideas spill out of the classroom and infuse the fabric of our students' everyday lives, a community that is intellectually exciting, where students and faculty expect to be challenged and have the resources to meet these challenges. The first year is crucial for creating that community among faculty and students.

College of Charleston's QEP

- Revitalizes first-year seminars and provides an academic focus
- Creates learning communities
- Develops non-credit peer-facilitated synthesis seminars to accompany
- Aligns support services

Accreditation and the FYE

Doing FYE work in the accreditation arena

- Requires clear explanations
- Promotes attention to learning outcomes
- Demands a thorough assessment plan
- Breaks down silos
- Focuses efforts
- Ensures funding