

THE MANTLE

Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

A Vision: Quality Enhancement via Core Values at the University of Mississippi

by Johnny W. Lott, Director

Dr. Amy Wells, Educational Leadership and Counselor Education, is one of several who has worked on the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for the University of Mississippi's SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) reaffirmation process. In January when the plan was being sent to the printer's, Dr. Wells shared some planning group thoughts about the QEP and the possible effect on faculty members.

The Mission and Goals Statement of the University of Mississippi phrase "to produce graduates who have the breadth and depth of knowledge to be lifelong learners, to be successful in their discipline, and to be good citizens" was uppermost for groups responsible for the QEP. That commitment led to improving student writing as the focus of the QEP.

As a result, the QEP relies on core values of reflection, collaborative learning, and community for its philosophical underpinning. These core values support implementation strategies for reshaping the freshman writing curriculum, improving writing support services, and enhancing the teaching-learning environment. Additionally, these core values are significant for all university teaching and learning, not just the writing component. As Dr. Wells discussed the QEP, the importance of each of the core values became increasingly clear.



Dr. Amy Wells

Reflection

In the QEP development process, Dr. Thomas Marshall said, "Our students don't think about what they know and what they don't know" (2009, p. 26). And that statement summarized very succinctly a need for student reflection in studies. This reflection is one part of what is needed if Ole Miss graduates are to be lifelong learners with a breadth and depth of knowledge. The reflection process is not often demonstrated in final products (tests, papers, etc.) but must be cultivated as students learn. But the reflection is naturally demonstrated in the writing process—especially if students and faculty adopt and use a portfolio system of assessment. Both the reflection process and portfolio assessment may be used in all disciplines and in learning across disciplines.

Collaborative Learning

The university mission requires that faculty members work to develop good productive citizens who make good decisions and solve problems. In early stages of student development, students see the world in dichotomies. They view parents and professors as experts and invest the faculty with complete responsibility for learning. College student

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SPECIAL ISSUE
Quality Enhancement Plan Explained

What Is Known about Our Students?

by Susan Mossing, Assistant Director

The University of Mississippi is one of 1,200 institutions of higher education that participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Mary Harrington, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, presented NSSE results in October at the professional development luncheon. Thirty-one percent of Ole Miss freshmen and seniors responded to the survey, providing insight into some of their thoughts and behaviors. Highlighted survey items pertaining to teaching and learning follow.

How deeply do students think?

Cognitive processes can be ordered in terms of the depth of understanding required of thinkers. At Ole Miss, this ranking fits with the undergraduate level of experience: freshmen rely more heavily on a more surface-level learning, memorization (3.07), than do seniors (2.95). Seniors rely more heavily on all other cognitive processes than do freshmen: application (3.26 vs. 3.16), analysis (3.27 vs. 3.13), and synthesis (3.09 vs. 2.97). [These numbers are based on a scale of 1-4.] Even though engaged in deeper levels of thinking, seniors do not feel more challenged by exams than freshmen (5.66 vs. 5.71, on a scale of 1-7).

How do students use their time?

The number of full time students on campus increased between 2004 (71%) and 2007 (82%). But students work between 1 and 5 hours per week, with seniors working slightly more than freshmen. Most students volunteer and provide service to the community with more freshmen volunteering than at other southern universities reporting (0.60 vs. 0.44, on a scale of 0-1). Furthermore, most students who have engaged in community service by the time they are seniors (0.68) likely did so as freshmen (0.60). Freshmen had greater frequencies of exercise (2.97 vs. 2.77), worship (2.53 vs. 2.51), and attendance at artistic exhibits or performances (2.41 vs.

2.03) than seniors. Seniors reported greater frequencies of gaining insight through learning (2.90 vs. 2.89), adapting alternative perspectives (2.86 vs. 2.80), and self-examination of views (2.73 vs. 2.69). [These measures used a scale of 1-4.]

The majority of students do not often come to class prepared; only 21% of freshmen and 19% of seniors report that they often or very often come prepared. The number of students that spend more than 20 hours/week preparing for class is low: 16% of freshmen and 20% of seniors.

How do students feel about Ole Miss?

Most students believe that Ole Miss provides the academic support they need to be successful; 77% of freshmen and 76% of seniors report this. Furthermore, 91% of freshmen and 89% of seniors evaluate their “entire educational experience at Ole

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Miss” to be good or excellent. Finally, 94% of undergraduate alumni would recommend Ole Miss to others.

Do you want to know more?

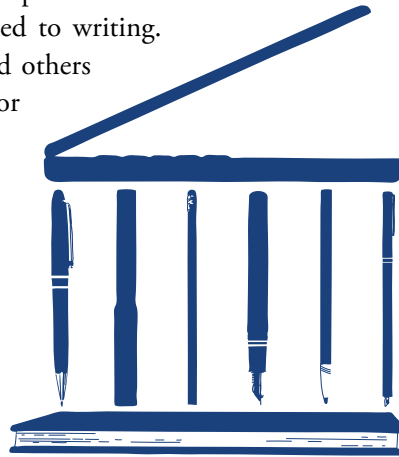
Ms. Harrington’s complete presentation can be accessed at www.olemiss.edu/depts/cetl under “special events.” Data used for her presentation as well as other research and assessment information can be accessed from Institutional Research and Assessment at http://olemiss.edu/depts/university_planning/index.html.

A Vision continued from Front Cover

cognitive development theory suggests that to facilitate intellectual development, students must encounter thinkers at higher levels to progress and develop over time. While it may seem risky for faculty to allow an increase in teaching by student peers, it can improve students' intellectual development. As a pragmatic example, consider the power of the extra-curriculum and students learning from each other about college social life.

The QEP seeks to unlock the power of peer instruction within the formal and co-curriculum related to writing.

Currently on campus, Dr. Keith Hollis and others present problems to teams of students for solution and use calibrated peer review to help them analyze and critique other students' writing. Such empowering of students enhances their learning and frees faculty from the "comma" prison to consider bigger issues and problems for classes. More teaching of this type could occur if writing support services and resources were readily available.



Community

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton discussed children needing a village as they grow and develop. Similarly, the teaching-learning environment needs a community to help students grow in writing. And that community cannot realistically be housed in a single department, center, or other like entity.

The entire university must become a writing community with a basic sense of shared values consistently communicated to students. Each instructor and professor is responsible to the university corpus for teaching writing in the courses shared widely by first-year students as well as the courses that follow for students in majors. For student writing to improve, each

teacher must (1) learn how to articulate, teach, and evaluate the shared community values for writing identified in the QEP, (2) teach and evaluate student writing in specific fields of study, and (3) seek the needed help for doing (1) and (2). Becoming a community is a necessity for helping students to understand what is expected of them so that they can better evaluate their own writing and work to make improvements.

Dr. Wells points out that to achieve a fully implemented QEP, the university needs faculty development for the teaching of writing, a visible location for "all things writing," an organizational support structure to move writing into the disciplines, faculty consideration of how to assess writing in specific disciplines, and enhanced resources related to writing including the use of electronic portfolios. The QEP will provide additional resources for these activities to be unfolded over a five-year period.

The QEP is ambitious and will require both labor and leadership. However, it is believed that faithful adherence to listed core values arising from an extensive review of literature and best practices in the field, will

help guarantee a lasting and real improvement in student writing at the University of Mississippi. No one expects an overnight accomplishment. A good place to start is for each individual to consider how the identified core values become an integral part of personal teaching.

Write here. Write now.

References

- Mission and Goals of the University of Mississippi*. Retrieved January 21, 2009, from <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/chancellor/mission.html>
- University of Mississippi. (2009). *Write here. Write now. The University of Mississippi 2009 Quality Enhancement Plan*. Oxford, MS: Office of the Provost.

Resources for Teaching

- See the weblink for an article entitled "The Slow Read." It provides food for thought in academic departments about scholarship: <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/03/10/waters> .
- For information on attrition and distance education, see the focus issue in the following: <http://www.facultyfocus.com/free-report/strategies-for-increasing-online-student-retention-and-satisfaction/?c=FF&t=F90109>

QEP Frequently Asked Questions

What is a QEP?

A QEP is a Quality Enhancement Plan. Our regional accrediting body, SACS, requires that we develop and implement such a plan within the next five years. According to SACS, the QEP describes a carefully designed course of action that addresses a well-defined and focused topic or issue related to enhancing student learning.

What is our QEP topic?

Our QEP focuses on improving student writing. In short, we want our students to: understand writing as a process; use writing to explore, reflect, and develop sound arguments; produce writing suitable for academic purposes; be able to integrate and properly document reliable and relevant research; and produce writing free of serious grammatical and mechanical errors.

How will the QEP improve student writing? (In other words, what will be new?)

The QEP proposes actions in three areas:

First-Year Composition — Reshape the curriculum, including Engl 101 and 102, and Liba 102.

Writing Center — Improve and Expand Services and Resources;

Teaching/Learning Environment — Improve training and support for teachers of writing.

As part of the plan, the existing writing center will be converted to the Center for Writing and Rhetoric (CWR), an academic unit devoted to improving student writing. Composition courses will be housed in the CWR, along with student tutoring and support services.

When will all this happen?

A national search is now underway for the CWR Director. In 2009-2010, this Director and others will lead a community-based effort to develop courses and assessment strategies. In 2010-2011, the new curricula will be piloted, and Writing Center services and hours will be expanded. In 2011-2012, the revised courses will be offered to all first-year students.

Is this only about freshman composition?

In its early stages, the QEP does focus on establishing a firm foundation by creating effective first-year writing courses. In its middle and later stages, however, the QEP broadens its focus by improving Advanced Composition and by creating support for writing within the disciplines. Also, the enhanced tutoring services offered through the CWR will be available to students at all levels.

Why this topic and not another for our QEP?

The Topic Selection Task Force and other committees worked for over two years to decide upon and develop the QEP topic. Why did these faculty, staff, and students choose “writing”? Writing -

- Was the #1 response in the faculty and staff survey;
- Was cited in Student Focus Groups as a major weakness;
- Dominated discussions of the Topic Selection Task Force;
- Was identified by the English Department Chair for urgent consideration;
- Is a nexus of critical thinking and research skills;
- Is part of UM’s current pedagogical framework;
- Is essential to students in all disciplines;
- Is valued by alumni, employers, and graduate schools; and
- Is deeply connected to our institutional history and mission

Who Developed the QEP?

In every sense of the word, the QEP was a “team” effort. Hundreds of people—faculty, students, staff, alumni, and others—have been involved in the development of the QEP. Many of their names appear in the QEP document.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI'S
Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)
Executive Summary

Input from faculty, staff, and students indicates that student writing needs to be improved.

The Quality Enhancement Plan recommends the following actions:

- Reshape the Composition Curriculum, including English 101, 102, and Liberal Arts 102
- Improve and Expand the Writing Center
- Provide More Support to Teachers of Writing

These actions will be undertaken from the Center for Writing and Rhetoric (CWR), a new center that will absorb responsibility for the following programs and services:

1. Courses in First-Year Writing (currently offered by the English Department)
2. Tutoring Services (writing) for students (currently offered by the Writing Center)
3. Courses in Basic Writing (currently offered by the Developmental Studies Office)
4. Support for the Teaching of Writing (currently offered to English graduate instructors and adjuncts by English; not currently offered to the faculty at large)

Also, the CWR will 1) create a writing placement process for first-year students; 2) develop an additional entry-level composition course; 3) adopt an e-portfolio system; and 4) pursue initiatives that support writing within the disciplines.

Through its programs and services, the CWR will instill in students the ability to:

- Understand writing as a process;
- Use writing to explore, reflect, and develop sound arguments;
- Produce writing suitable for academic purposes;
- Integrate and properly cite reliable and relevant research/documents; and
- Produce writing free of serious grammatical and mechanical errors.

A national search for the CWR Director is now underway.

Details are in the Quality Enhancement Plan, a 100-page document available online at:
www.olemiss.edu/qep



www.olemiss.edu/qep

Teaching Tips

Technology Enhanced Active Learning at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

MIT no longer teaches physics to classes of 300 but has changed to smaller sections with required attendance and using technology as a primary delivery tool. Attendance is up; the pass rate is up; and students like the classes more according to an article at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/13/us/13physics.html?pagewanted=2&r=1&hp> .

With teaching methods still being perfected, MIT is not alone in the change in type of instruction. Carl E. Wieman, the 2001 Nobel Prize in Physics and the United States Professor of the Year in 2004, was the only faculty member to hold both the highest research (Distinguished Professor) and teaching (Presidential Teaching Scholar) awards at the University of Colorado. Weiman, now at the University of British Columbia (UBC), has long been promoting changes in the way science in general and physics in particular should and could be taught. In 2006, UBC committed \$12 million over five years to provide an unprecedented quality of education for science students. See <http://www.publicaffairs.ubc.ca/media/releases/2006/mr-06-032.html> .

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