

## Accrediting Agency Required Annual Update

August 2007

Since the August 10, 2006, Response Report to the Visiting Committee, progress has been made on the QEP, and various assessment measures have been modified or implemented in accordance with the expected outcomes of the plan. In addition, initial assessment results, though limited, have already helped the QEP Steering Committee (QEPSC) envision more clearly the progress of the plan. The following narrative provides an overview of the University's progress thus far, as well the ways in which the data gathered will be used to further enhance the implementation of the QEP

Pre- and Post-Test

Initially, the QEP called for use of the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) test primarily as a means of assessing graduate students' writing progress. However, as the August 10, 2006, response report notes (see Appendix A), the CAAP's writing prompt is flawed for a variety of reasons. To that end, the Director of the Graduate Writing Center (GWC), QEP Director, Director of the Graduate Center for Research and Evaluation, Director of Assessment, and QEP Steering Committee have developed a testing instrument that measures the skills of incoming graduate students more appropriately. Additionally, a rubric was designed to evaluate the writing sample that students produce. This instrument will also serve as a placement test for the newly developed Introduction to Graduate Writing course (GRST 500). The multiple-choice portions of the exam are designed to identify students with basic English problems (QEP Learning Outcome One); the writing prompt is designed to identify those students whose critical thinking and higher-level writing skills are not at the graduate level (QEP

Learning Outcome Two). This test will also provide pre-test data against which post-test data, once collected, can be compared.

This instrument is more suitable than the CAAP for the following reasons: (1) It simulates the kind of topic that students may be asked to write in the very early stages of a graduate program (summary/response); (2) It offers more complete instructions; (3) It offers evaluative criteria that focuses on the QEP Learning Outcomes; (4) It allows students more time for the writing portion; (5) It will be administered on a computer in a lab and thus approximates "real writing" more closely; and (6) It aligns with the University's mission statement, as it asks students to reflect on their spiritual lives—something that Liberty students are routinely expected to do. The GWC is currently administering the exam to a randomly selected group of students in order to determine the effectiveness of the rubric.

Exams will be scored by the Director and Assistant Director of the GWC, in addition to other trained graders. The results of this assessment will be used to make adjustments to the fulfillment of the QEP goal, if necessary. Adjustments may—and likely will—include the following: fine tuning the curriculum of GRST 500 so as to address students' weaknesses more effectively, creating workshops for faculty on teaching various writing or critical thinking skills, and suggesting curricular changes to departments across the University.

#### Other Student-Focused Assessment Measures

In addition to the assessment measures described in the QEP (satisfaction surveys, focus groups, etc.):

1. At the end of their programs, randomly selected students will be given a post-test writing assessment that will be evaluated with the same rubric used on the pre-test.

2. Students who complete GRST 500 will be given a course-embedded post-test that approximates the pre-test.
3. The GWC will randomly select student theses and dissertations for evaluation using the research rubric designed specifically for this purpose.

All these data may be used to adjust the curriculum of GRST 500 or the second writing course, *Writing in the Disciplines* (currently under development) as necessary, thereby enhancing implementation of the QEP.

#### Faculty-Focused and Administrative Assessment Measures

In addition to the assessment measures described in the QEP, faculty and appropriate administrative personnel will do the following:

1. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness will continue to coordinate and deliver various writing-related workshops such as: Constructing Successful Writing Assignments (8/9/06), Evaluating Writing Assignments (9/26/06), Avoiding Plagiarism (10/24/06), University Writing Resources (3/20/07), and Common Grammar Errors (5/24/07). There were several other writing-related workshops as well (Rubric Training, etc.), as well as a two-day writing assessment workshop. All workshops are evaluated at the time of presentation, and results are used to make adjustments in planning future sessions. Attendance at all workshops has been excellent, suggesting a high level of interest by the faculty members.
2. The Director of the GWC is developing several workshops for fall 2007 in response to faculty needs—MLA documentation, for example, as well as Common Punctuation Errors. This process will continue beyond fall 2007.

3. As the second writing course is developed, the QEP Director, Director of the GWC, and Director of Assessment will work with each graduate department across the university in the following ways: (1) developing discipline specific measurable learning outcomes consistent with those in the QEP; (2) developing writing-intensive coursework/assignments; (3) writing syllabi that address the QEP's stated learning outcomes. A worksheet will be distributed to departments to begin these discussions.
4. The Graduate Center for Research and Evaluation offers an annual Poster Session and Research Forum that provides a venue for faculty and graduate students conducting research to present their work. Increased participation will demonstrate that a culture of research is being developed and enhanced at Liberty University.
5. The Director of the GWC has created a survey that is administered to all students who come to the GWC for an individual tutorial. The results—which have been overwhelmingly positive, with an average of 4.5 on a 5.0 point Lickert Scale—suggest that the GWC has been effective with below-average students and with those students who are nearing completion of their programs. The data also indicates that GWC addresses the needs of ESL students better than those of native English speakers. Using this data, the Director of the GWC is focusing on specific needs with individual tutors and researching ways to close the gap between the ESL and the native English-speaker experience in the GWC, as well as ways to address the needs of students in the middle of their programs.
6. Tutors have conducted interviews with randomly selected tutees to find out what changes would make their GWC experiences more beneficial. Students have had have indicated that would like the GWC to advertise its services more extensively. A budget for this has

been established for the 2007-08 school year, and a statement about the GWC and its services has been distributed for inclusion in the syllabi.

7. GWC Tutors are conducting interviews with faculty to see how the GWC can best address their students' needs. Results are shared with other GWC employees and, as necessary, changes are implemented in tutorials.

### Conclusion

All assessment measures for the initial stages of the QEP have been implemented. Adjustments have been made as needed to allow greater responsiveness to Liberty University's students and faculty. In the future, the QEPSC will address how to assess the effectiveness of the student and faculty training strategies and their impact at later times in the student's graduate career (especially after completion of *Writing in the Disciplines*). These assessment measures will be developed within departments by the faculty in each discipline, with assistance from the Core Writing Group and QEPSC.