

What is a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)?

A QEP is a required component of the accreditation process of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). It is a carefully designed, 5-year, course of action that addresses a well-defined and focused topic or issue related to enhancing student learning. Key components of a QEP include well-defined student learning outcomes and assessments, broad participation of the university community, and the potential to be transformative.

Why should I care?

The QEP is an opportunity to enhance our overall quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue we consider important to enhancing the learning experience of our students. USC will invest significant resources in the QEP which must be comprehensive and impact a significant portion of Carolina students (Columbia, Lancaster, Union, Salkahatchie, Sumter campuses). Our goal is for all students to be positively impacted by the QEP, so all programs will be involved.

Who is coming up with this plan?

Faculty, staff, and students are the drivers of the QEP. A general call to faculty in 2009-2010 provided the initial input and selection of potential QEP topics and proposals. The QEP proposal and its subcommittees include representation from across the Carolina community.

When will decisions be made?

The full, 100-page draft of the QEP Proposal will be submitted to the Provost's Office in December to go to SACS. During our SACS visit in late March, we will receive input on the proposal and continue to revise through Summer 2011.

Is the QEP one more thing to be "added on" which will drain resources from our core mission?

No! The QEP must grow from our mission and be incorporated into existing structures. It will build on what we are already doing. The proposed QEP, USConnect: Integrating Learning Within and Beyond the Classroom, focuses on helping students make intentional choices from existing opportunities and *connecting* experiences through reflection, discussion, and application.

Coming soon to a college/department/meeting near you!! Information and discussion about USConnect will be pervasive across our campuses in 2010-2011 and beyond. QEP representatives will join meetings to provide information and seek input. QEP information will be continually updated on the website: <http://www.sc.edu/provost/gep/> where electronic feedback can also be submitted. Look for announcements on upcoming discussion forums!

We need to hear from YOU!

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INTEGRATING LEARNING WITHIN AND BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

USCONNECT

University of South Carolina QEP Proposal

The University of South Carolina's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), USConnect, focuses on empowering students through integrative learning in which they synthesize a strong general education background, preparation in their major area of study, and beyond-the-classroom experiences. At USC, integrative learning focuses on engaging students in a broad array of in- and beyond-the-classroom experiences and supporting students in making productive **connections** between theory and practice. Students' grounding in diverse learning experiences and real world contexts orients students to consider a variety of perspectives as they apply their learning and experiences to solve problems, make sound decisions, and create unique solutions. Faculty and professional staff support students in making these connections.

As defined by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), integrative and applied learning is an "understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus".

The first step in the process is to assist students in selecting experiences which will enrich their lives and academic work. While USC students are already engaged in a wide variety of beyond-the-classroom experiences, this means making learning opportunities, and the connections between them, transparent so that students select experiences *intentionally*. So, for example, it would be easy for a student interested in the Mediterranean to be aware of the Spanish Language House (a Living and Learning Community), faculty members who have connections to the region, relevant course work, upcoming events (e.g., seminar on Greek cooking, visiting scholar lecture), and opportunities for study abroad in the region. Support for identifying and tracking beyond-the-classroom experiences at USC is provided through an innovative technology platform that draws from databases of experiences, academic resources, user interests, and other information to provide access and make recommendations to users regarding opportunities that meet their needs and interests.

Beyond-the-classroom experiences at USC include a broad array of brief or one-time experiences such as attendance at a lecture by a world leader or participation in the Martin Luther King Service Day. Beyond-the-classroom options also include extended experiences that provide opportunities for more comprehensive, systematic reflection and assessment of student ability to make in-depth connections (e.g., internships, research projects, service learning semesters, leadership programs, study abroad). By engaging in diverse experiences in ways that support reflection, analysis, and synthesis, students deepen learning and are better equipped to assume leadership roles both during college and beyond their undergraduate experience.