



Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) has chosen to focus the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) on building, integrating, and sustaining undergraduate research practices and programs, with an emphasis on applied critical thinking. The Plan is called *ACT on IDEAS*. *ACT* represents the focus of the plan – *Applied Critical Thinking* – while *IDEAS* denotes the phases of the plan—*Investigate, Decide, Express, and Achieve*. *ACT on IDEAS* will: (1) Promote undergraduate research through direct connections with faculty and peers; (2) Empower undergraduate students by enhancing critical thinking and research skills; (3) Provide undergraduate students with the skills and opportunities to express their knowledge and apply it to substantive local and global issues. The broad-based QEP will impact all disciplines across the University and offer highly motivated students a multitude of enriching experiences.

At the outset, all entering students will explore research in their freshmen year, specifically in seminar courses required for all incoming students. When these students advance to their sophomore year, they will be required to interact with faculty and research peers at various events. In these formative years for students, the Plan not only raises awareness of research across campus but connects students with faculty in their discipline. These connections are vital in creating a culture of research among students and helping to educate them about the prominent role of research at TAMIU, their role as members of the research community, and opportunities to actively engage in research as they matriculate through their respective academic programs. In students' junior year, the Plan targets a smaller population who will be enrolled in discipline-specific critical thinking courses. These courses will allow students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills to master higher-order learning outcomes. Finally, students motivated to pursue hands-on mentored opportunities with faculty will find various structured outlets where their critical thinking and research skills will be sharpened.

ACT on IDEAS identifies four specific student learning outcomes (SLOs):

- SLO 1: Students will be able to justify appropriate conclusions based on the evaluation of facts and correlated data.
- SLO 2: Students will be able to analyze new data, information, or observations creatively when defining a research problem.
- SLO 3: Students will be able to solve problems by evaluating information and designing solutions.
- SLO 4: Students will be able to articulate their research findings through written, performance, and/or oral presentation.

The SLOs, which are not discipline-specific, are direct, compact, and applicable to developing applied critical thinking through undergraduate research. The SLOs correlate with nationally recognized assessment instruments, especially the Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT), and are thus suited to providing reliable and assessable data.

TAMIU has existing institutional capability to initiate the mission and goals of the QEP and will progressively strengthen this capability throughout the span of the Plan. Dr. Dan Mott (dmott@tamiu.edu) will serve as Director of Undergraduate Research (DUGR) and will, among other duties: oversee the development, implementation, communication, and assessment of the QEP; coordinate presentations and workshops for both students and faculty; work closely with the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects (ORSP) to guide faculty toward grants and research opportunities; chair selection committees for undergraduate research fellowships; coordinate curriculum changes as needed to support the Plan; and supervise staff involved in QEP implementation. Thus, the DUGR will be the central figure in coordinating activities related to the Plan's goals.