

“The Writing Connection”: A Scaffolded Approach to Improving Undergraduate Student Writing Skills, Gardner-Webb University

Executive Summary

Process for Topic Selection: The topic of GWU’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) emerged from a year-long, university-wide process. Ideas were first solicited from faculty regarding the areas of student learning needing the most urgent attention. The most frequently identified areas were shared with faculty, and next, faculty submitted proposals. The top three were presented to faculty and students for feedback. Students strongly advocated for the proposal to improve student writing. This topic also correlates to GWU’s Mission Statement, Strategic Plan, and General Education Learning Goals, and it will contribute to the university’s emphasis on Professional Readiness. The QEP is titled “The Writing Connection.”

Goals: GWU’s QEP seeks to create a connection between writing in First-Year Composition (FYC) and writing in content-specific General Education and majors courses. The goal is to create an academic culture of writing that extends across the curriculum so that students are better connected to their education and beyond – career and civic and family life. Focusing on writing should also lead to students becoming deeper thinkers and better communicators, leading to better prepared graduates. The Writing Connection will also seek to help faculty grow in their teaching. In order to accomplish these goals, the QEP Committee designed a new graduation requirement of five Writing Intensive courses structured in Three Tiers, from FYC to senior year. After announcing the WI requirement but before faculty voted on it, the QEP Committee shared all steps of the decision-making process and invited feedback from faculty, staff, and administration.

Student Learning Outcomes: The QEP SLOs are: 1) Students will apply a guided writing process; 2) Students will produce writing that reflects an awareness of context and purpose, including the use of appropriate grammar and mechanics; 3) Students will employ discipline-specific terminology and conventions of writing; and 4) Students will evaluate the credibility and relevance of sources, integrate sources with their own ideas, and document their research correctly. These emerged directly from faculty input. The SLOs also correlate with the Council of WPA’s Learning Outcomes which GWU’s FYC SLOs are also aligned with. The QEP SLOs were designed so that writing instruction in Tier Two will build upon instruction in Tier One, and Tier Three will build on instruction in both Tiers One and Two, so that the transfer of writing skills will be facilitated.

Capability/Assessment: The QEP will support faculty with continuous training and professional development in best teaching practices teaching Writing Intensive Courses. Both faculty and students will be supported by a new Writing Fellows program and by expanded services at the Writing Center. Additionally, a new faculty committee will be developed to approve WI courses. All WI courses will be assessed using the QEP Writing Rubric, and results will be used to adjust the curriculum. The CLA+ exam will be used as a longitudinal, external measurement tool. Existing and new indirect assessment tools such as surveys will to be used to monitor the impact of the QEP on students and faculty.

Contact: Dr. Cheryl Duffus, QEP Director and Associate Professor of English Language and Literature, cduffus@gardner-webb.edu