

Brevard College

Quality Enhancement Plan

Pedagogies for Engaged and Actively-Learning Students

Executive Summary:

“Engagement” has been a hot topic in higher education for the past decade. Since the first administration of the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) in 2000, over 1450 four-year colleges and universities in the US and Canada have used the tool as a way of discerning “the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities” (<http://nsse.iub.edu/html/about.cfm>). NSSE asks students to self-report on a range of behaviors shown to represent “best practices” in higher education: from having serious conversations with people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds to participating in an array of extracurricular activities.

At Brevard College, we are particularly interested in how “engagement” looks in the academic arena (the classroom, lab, studio, etc.). We have identified five behavioral constellations that characterize students who are academically “engaged”: they are **present** in class, **prepared** for class, and **participating** in class activities; beyond this, they are **professional** in the ways they present themselves and their work, and **passionate** about learning. These 5 Ps represent areas that can be observed, measured, and improved by both direct and mediated interventions. Improvement in the “course effort behaviors” of the 5 Ps constitutes significant learning, with the potential to enhance success not only in academics, but in other life pursuits as well.

Our QEP assumes that effecting a transformation in student learning requires close attention to what faculty members are doing to promote that learning. Hence, both our direct and mediated approaches to improving the 5 Ps involve faculty development initiatives. The direct approach consists of task forces devoted to identifying and disseminating “best practices” related specifically to enhancing presence, preparation, and professionalism. The mediated approach consists of a faculty-wide commitment to achieving distinction in the use of active-learning pedagogies through the creation of a BCP (Brevard College Pedagogies) program. Through this program, faculty receive course-release time on a rotational basis to participate in teaching circles or other initiatives devoted to active learning strategies; outside experts are brought to campus to conduct faculty-wide workshops; a web-based newsletter enables faculty and students to share success stories related to diverse learning strategies; a competitive funding program supports faculty in travel/study to attend conferences on active learning as well as in mini-grants to integrate enrichment activities (simulation games, field trips, etc.) into their courses. From the BCP program, we expect to see increases in the measures of participation and passion among our students. Indeed, a review of the educational literature gives us good reason to expect that active-learning pedagogies will increase measures of presence, participation, and professionalism as well.

A focus on “Pedagogies for Engaged and Actively-learning Students” thus addresses Commitment Two of the Brevard College Strategic Plan, “to promote student engagement,” as well as the College’s mission to “[nurture] the personal and holistic development of each student,” by attending to the ways such development is fostered by meaningful behavioral change.

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