

**Institution: Charleston Southern University**  
**QEP Title: Experiential Learning Initiative**  
**QEP Director: Dr. Nathan Martin, nmartin@csuniv.edu**

### **Executive Summary: The Experiential Learning Initiative (ELI)**

Charleston Southern University's Quality Enhancement Plan, the Experiential Learning Initiative (ELI), will provide enriched educational opportunities for CSU undergraduates in one or more of the following areas: practical and applied learning, enhanced learning, and skill enrichment. ELI will reinforce general and discipline-specific classroom theory with practical application in nontraditional environments in order to prepare students for employment or other post-graduate opportunities.

From an institutional perspective, the ELI program advances CSU's mission of "promoting academic excellence in a Christian environment" through creating new internships, field and travel courses, service learning courses, and other applied learning opportunities. CSU's vision of "integrating faith in learning, leading, and serving," also corresponds with the goals and objectives of the program, in support of requirement that the QEP accomplish the mission of the institution (CR 2.12). According to current research, experiential learning opportunities have substantial potential benefits for undergraduate students including stronger student satisfaction regarding overall university experience, the development of transferable skills beyond the classroom, and improved career placements.

As required by CS 3.3.2, the topic selection and design of ELI were based on feedback from faculty, staff, students, and other community partners. Faculty responses to internal assessments and surveys revealed overwhelming support for an experiential learning program for CSU's QEP. Similar positive support was demonstrated by the staff, student leaders, and the student body at large. Community partners also contributed qualitatively through focus groups and through advisement of potential advantages and pitfalls. The selection of the ELI focus was further supported through review of CSU results on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI), which indicated the need for greater development of the academic experience for CSU undergraduates.

In compliance with CS 3.3.2's requirement that the QEP "identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement," the goals of ELI include enhancing the understanding of discipline-specific theory through application in real-world environments and developing reflection and communication skills. Four student learning outcomes are associated with each of the three goals of the program and are assessed with standardized rubrics. To facilitate student access and flexibility of academic approaches, ELI incorporates a multi-faceted approach to experiential opportunities. The first model includes internship, practicum, and clinical courses. The second includes field experiences, applied learning, and service projects. The third approach includes courses focused on career skill development. The assessment of goals and learning outcomes are based on these three types of experiential opportunities.

The QEP Planning Committee collected data showing current course offerings in experiential learning at CSU. To increase capacity, departments have established plans to create more experiential courses. An ELI Oversight Committee has been created and an Internship Coordinator has been hired to ensure effective implementation. The Director of the QEP will file annual reports with the VPAA on the plan's progress. Coordination of efforts through the Office of the Registrar, the Office of Career Services, and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness have been initiated to engender successful outcomes.

As indicated by the budget data attached in Chapter IX of the ELI plan, CSU is making a substantial financial commitment in order to realize the success of the ELI program. Some expenses will constitute continuing costs for CSU's annual operations budget while others are one-time or short-term costs that end after implementation. The university's commitment to the ELI program is evidenced by the inclusion of experiential learning implementation in CSU's Strategic Plan for 2014-2019, and an analysis of CSU's financial records indicate a capacity to finance all aspects of the ELI program.