

CORNERSTONE EXPERIENCE: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS
A QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN, EDISON STATE COLLEGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of Edison State College's proposed QEP is to enable first-time-in-college students to become self-reliant learners imbued with critical thinking skills.

To promote personal growth and academic success, Edison State College (ESC) proposes a three-credit course for first-time degree-seeking students titled SLS 1515 Cornerstone Experience. Emphasizing critical thinking, self-reliance, and persistence, the course will empower students with knowledge-based skills and enhance their capacity to apply critical thinking to their professional and personal lives, supporting success in their studies at ESC and beyond. For faculty and staff, this Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) includes a comprehensive suite of professional development experiences that will foster a common understanding of critical thinking and engender an appreciation for the strengths and needs of first-year students.

Over a two-year period beginning in August 2008, faculty, students, administrators, staff and consultants participated in internal and external research to identify the QEP topic that would have the greatest impact on student learning. Included in the process was a nine-month, externally guided self-study using the Foundations of Excellence® (FOE) in the First College Year assessment model. In April 2009, the QEP focus emerged as a unique version of a first-year experience (FYE) course infused with critical thinking.

The QEP is aligned with the College's mission of inspiring learning and preparing students for responsible participation in a global society. Beginning January 2012, the course will facilitate students' learning not just about the course topics, but also about the College, their peers, themselves and their individual abilities. The curriculum is grounded in four foundational frameworks of Critical Thinking, Applied Learning, Relevancy and Success Strategies. While students will be introduced to all of ESC's general education competencies, they will specifically explore issues about the nature and techniques of critical thought as a way to establish a reliable basis for claims, beliefs, and attitudes based on the Paul and Elder Elements of Reasoning and the Universal Intellectual Standards model adopted by faculty. The course requirement for all degree-seeking FTIC students will be phased in over a five-year period.

Course content and student learning outcomes emerged from best-practice literature review and the FOE self-study, and are tailored to what is unique to the student experience at ESC. The QEP Committee was guided by expert assistance from the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina.

Student success will be enhanced by faculty and staff training ranging from understanding the first-year student to topic-specific activities targeting each of the four frameworks. Students will also benefit from the comprehensive and coordinated support initiatives of ESC's emerging first-year experience (FYE) program, Foundations of Self-Reliant Learning. While not specifically part of the QEP, this umbrella program will bolster the new student experience through an enhanced College orientation, an early alert system, and improved intake processes including admissions and advising.

The initial six-year, \$5.2 million QEP operating budget was determined to be offset by tuition due to enhanced retention and State FTE funding generated by Cornerstone Experience enrollment.