

QEP: The Nature of Evidence

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

Executive Summary

An engagement with the nature of evidence is fundamental to the mission of Emory University. Our conviction that knowledge, understanding, and intellectual confidence depend on engaged and reflective encounters with evidence unifies Emory's educational mission across schools, disciplines, and degrees.

Vision: In keeping with Emory's overall goal of enhancing undergraduate education and to align the undergraduate experience with the research opportunities and expertise at Emory, *The Nature of Evidence* focuses on helping first-year students on the main campus evaluate and analyze different forms of evidence. The overarching goal of our QEP is to empower students as independent scholars capable of supporting arguments with different types of evidence.

Program Components: The QEP contains three components: 1) an introductory orientation experience, 2) a classroom experience, and 3) a co-curricular experience. Discussions of evidence will be embedded in the online orientation program with the goal of providing students with a brief introduction to fundamental issues around evidence and to inspire continued interest in the subject. The classroom experience is linked to an existing first-year seminar program required of all first-time students on the Atlanta campus. Students will receive didactic instruction in disciplinary approaches to evidence and the standards of the discipline regarding the definition, use, effective presentation, and critique of evidence. The co-curricular experience (Evidence-in-Action) is designed to facilitate student engagement with the academic use of evidence outside the classroom and to serve as a platform for evidence experiences across disciplines. With these components, students will finish their first year with a sound understanding of the building blocks of knowledge and be prepared to conduct research.

Learning Outcomes: Our QEP learning outcomes aim to foster an academic environment of critical analysis, discovery, problem solving and scholarly thinking.

1. Distinguish uses of evidence between disciplines

- Distinguish between primary and secondary sources
- Demonstrate an understanding of how different disciplines use different types of evidence, such as experiments, examples, authoritative testimony, quantitative research, historical artifacts, and creative works

2. Access, locate, analyze, and identify evidence

- Access and locate evidence in print and in electronic or digital form
- Analyze the accuracy and relevance of evidence
- Identify a variety of types and formats of potential sources of evidence
- Confidently make use of the library and other learning resources on campus

3. Evaluate evidence

- Evaluate the quality, credibility, reliability, and validity of different types of evidence
- Determine the usefulness of evidence for different purposes

4. Build arguments based on primary evidence and assess the arguments of others

- Construct a clear thesis and develop an argumentative essay based on evidence
- Select appropriate evidence to support and illustrate claims

The Nature of Evidence developed out of a university-wide engagement with students, faculty, staff and alumni, institutional assessment, and a survey of best practices. Faculty development will be central to the implementation of the QEP. During summer workshops, faculty members will share effective strategies for teaching first-year evidence-based seminars and develop sound assessment methods. An Assessment Committee comprised of faculty and staff will evaluate the three components of the QEP.

Please contact Dr. Tracy Scott, QEP Director for additional information (tscott@emory.edu)