

Building the Brotherhood:
A First-Year Initiative to Form Good Men and Good Citizens in an Atmosphere of Sound Learning
Hampden-Sydney College

Executive Summary:

Consistent with the Hampden-Sydney College mission statement—“To form good men and good citizens in an atmosphere of sound learning”—our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) introduces a revised First-Year Experience that directly impacts student learning through an emphasis on student engagement, reflection, and connection. Entitled “Building the Brotherhood: A First-Year Initiative to Form Good Men and Good Citizens in an Atmosphere of Sound Learning,” the QEP builds directly upon best practices research, institutional data, and ongoing strategic planning initiatives.

Hampden-Sydney is an all-male, residential, liberal arts college located in southcentral Virginia. With an enrollment just over 1,000 students, our small size, rural location, and all-male student body create a unique atmosphere well suited for reflection, student-faculty interactions, and student connections. Despite these strengths, when constituents from across the college were solicited in 2014 for ideas and feedback in preparation for developing the QEP, many noted that the College was not fully reaping the benefits of a comprehensive First-Year program. Although several initiatives were in place related to students’ first year development, these initiatives were neither cohesive nor goal-driven. These stated concerns were supported further by institutional data and were relevant to research that shows the utility of first-year programming for enhancing student engagement, learning, and retention. On this basis, the QEP Selection Committee - which included members from each major College constituency—elected to make the First-Year Experience (FYE) the focus of the new H-SC QEP. Following this decision, the QEP Steering Committee, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty, and the Offices of Student Affairs, Student Success, Career Education and Vocational Reflection, Alumni Relations, and members of the Student Government, developed an FYE with three primary components: Reflection, Discovery, and Connection.

Reflection: Based on the assumption that a “good man and good citizen” is self-aware and able to relate empathically to the diverse experiences of others, the FYE engages students in ongoing reflection on their personal experiences and the experiences of others as they relate to the themes of honor, citizenship, service, purpose, and masculinity.

Discovery: The FYE introduces students to the process of scholarly inquiry as a means of enhancing reasoning skills, emphasizing the value of informed, civil discourse, and increasing students’ engagement in their own educations.

Connection: Because understanding how to communicate effectively and professionally with others is a necessary skill for workplace success, the FYE connects students with alumni mentors who will foster students’ professional communication skills and model the applicability of a liberal arts education to the working world.

The QEP Director and Steering Committee in partnership with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness will work together to assess student learning outcomes associated with each component of the FYE, as well as the broader impact of a more cohesive FYE at the College. Data will include student work samples and other behavioral indicators, as well as surveys of student, faculty, and staff responses to the initiatives. These data will provide evidence of progress and will also be used to guide ongoing program development. Importantly, because the First-Year Experience QEP at H-SC will be built upon and is integrated with existing campus-wide initiatives, it will remain a priority and continue to develop in years to come.

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