

Learning for Life: Experience Your Future, Northwestern State University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), is a University-wide effort to improve student learning by connecting classroom theoretical knowledge with a real-world experience – Undergraduate Research, Internship, Study Abroad, and Performance-Based Event or Project.

The process for developing *Learning for Life* began in fall 2014, when the provost asked for a team to consider recent research and practice to develop a plan to enhance student learning. Experiential Learning, which included multiple high-impact experiential practices, was ultimately selected as the foundation for the QEP and implementation began in the summer and fall 2016 semesters.

The goal of *Learning for Life* is preparing students to transfer theory into practice as they transition from University settings to a career or advanced study in graduate or professional schools. This goal supports Northwestern's commitment to teaching and learning and aligns with the University's vision to "become the Nation's premier regional university through the innovative delivery of transformative student learning experiences that prepare graduates for life and career success" (*Strategic Plan, 2016-2021*, p. 4). Experiential education will allow the University to "assist in the development of an ever-growing individual, scholar, and professional" (p.5). Further, two key components of Northwestern's mission will be supported by implementing *Learning for Life*: "The creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge" as well as "preparing students to become productive members of society" (p.4).

A survey distributed in October 2016 to Northwestern department heads and directors revealed that most (92%) degree programs require capstone experiences, followed by internships (40%) and undergraduate research (36%). However, there was no University-wide plan for defining, monitoring, and/or tracking these activities. *Learning for Life* will provide organization and enhancements to existing experiential learning activities and will add new opportunities for all students in all disciplines. It specifies that faculty in each degree program based on their content and professional expertise will choose at least one of four selected high-impact activities: all students in a degree program or concentration will engage in the same activity; and the experience will occur during the student's junior or senior year, thus a capstone event. The QEP targets at least eight-degree programs each year with the goal of 100% integration in all degree programs by 2020.

To measure the effectiveness of the *Learning for Life* Plan, two rubrics that align SLO benchmarks to the NSEE "Principles of Good Practice" (1998) were created as focus areas for Northwestern's QEP:

SLO 1 – During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection. (Aligned to Principles 4, Reflection, and 6, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement)

SLO 2 – During the capstone experiential course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection (Aligned to Principles 4, Reflection, and 6 Monitoring and Continuous Improvement).

For information regarding additional development and/or implementation, please contact William Brent, QEP Director, at brent@nsula.edu or 318-357-6888.