

Oglethorpe University, Atlanta, Georgia

Quality Enhancement Plan: Fostering a Culture of Engaged Learning for First Year Students

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Oglethorpe 's QEP, is designed to address four goals for first-year student learning and to provide an environment to support such learning.

The four goals of the QEP are:

- (1) to ensure a successful transition to college;
- (2) to develop critical thinking skills;
- (3) to promote an integrated approach to learning; and
- (4) to encourage and cultivate active citizenship.

The two initiatives proposed for achieving these four goals are a co-curricular participation initiative (now known as the "Petrel Points" program) and the establishment of learning communities that link two first year courses with groups of approximately 15 students participating in each of the communities. The Petrel Points program is designed to engage our first-year students more deeply with the Oglethorpe community and with the city of Atlanta. This program requires that students participate in various events both on campus and in the Atlanta community to earn a total of 12 "points" distributed across three categories of events: Arts and Ideas (6 points), Civic Engagement (4 points), and Campus Leadership and Citizenship (2 points). The learning communities comprise a one-hour per week seminar linked to a section of the first-year CORE curriculum class required of all students, *Narratives of the Self*. These communities, which provide each student with a peer group and faculty mentors, continue throughout the two semesters of the student's first year. Many Petrel Point events (a CORE movie series, trips for the group to Atlanta events) are linked to the learning communities, while other events (the orientation service project and the class orientation trip) specifically provide opportunities for all first year students to engage each other as well as the curriculum and the community. Linking classroom learning with co-curricular learning experiences and with opportunities for service and citizenship, this first year experience fosters a solid foundation for achieving the four goals and for a successful undergraduate experience.