

Integrating Students into the Academy of Thought and Knowledge through Interdisciplinary Studies

Schreiner University

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The Schreiner University Quality Enhancement Plan replaces the University's existing interdisciplinary studies program (IDST), with an enhanced and integrated core and common curriculum that all undergraduate students take regardless of their degree. The new QEP program provides students with a dynamic and graduated foundation in scholarship that transfers across curricula and academic disciplines, develops student knowledge and perspectives as a global citizen, and translates into professional preparation for the 21st century. In doing so, the QEP increases student engagement in the wider community of scholars.

The goals of the QEP are 1) to introduce students to the Academy of Thought and Knowledge; 2) to engage students in a community of learners through enculturation in an environment that inspires critical and creative thinking; 3) to facilitate students' development of their self-image as inquiring and reflective learners; and 4) to promote student understanding of how critical thinking, creativity, and scholarly practices can be used to solve problems.

The student learning outcomes of the QEP are that, as a result of their IDST experience, graduates will be able to

- understand the concept of the Academy of Thought and Knowledge, and incorporate its principles into their scholarly work,
- engage in a community of critical and creative learners,
- identify themselves as an inquiring and reflective learners, and
- apply critical thinking, creativity, and scholarly practices to solve a problem.

The QEP is being implemented through the design and phase-in of four new, sequential IDST courses. Each course beyond the freshman year will be increased from the existing two credit hours to three credit hours, and each will have specific learning objectives that are directly related to the QEP outcomes. The first-year course defines and contextualizes the Academy of Thought and Knowledge and introduces incoming college students to the foundations of research, scholarship, thought, and knowledge. The sophomore year course focuses on critical thinking and the ways in which cultural conditioning shapes and constrains engagement in a community of learners. The junior year course offers students the opportunity to examine and reflect on their own creativity by investigating the motivations behind the human desire to create. In the senior year, students will use the perspectives of different cultures to better understand both the origins of and potential solutions to problems.

The QEP fits well within Schreiner University's culture of continuous improvement and its goal to support, promote, and initiate curricular and co-curricular programs which instill a culture of demonstrable excellence within a diverse community of scholars. Like the planning process, the implementation of the QEP remains highly participative, drawing on the perspectives and experiences of a large number of faculty, staff, students, and others, and it is widely supported by the campus community and the Board of Trustees. The QEP continues on a successful implementation path because it is built on existing institutional strengths and has proven to be manageable and sustainable in terms of staffing, budget, and assessment.