

Title: "Writing as a Pillar of Academic Achievement"

The American University in Dubai

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Executive Summary

AUD's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), entitled "Writing as a Pillar of Academic Achievement," is not the result of the nearly two-year SACSCOC Reaffirmation process, but the culmination of years of assessment of teaching and learning in writing and the conviction that AUD needs to and can do better. It suffices to say that while the university's Mission makes explicit reference to "excellence" and its general education competencies include "effective communication skills in . . . writing. . . ." and a number of other skills (such as critical thinking) related to writing, virtually everyone at AUD feels and points to a gap between the desired level of students' writing abilities and the reality. It is not surprising, therefore, that in engaging AUD's various constituencies (faculty, students, staff, advisory councils, alumni, employers, and the governing board) in a multi-tiered process of problem identification, improved writing "bubbled to the top" as a target for the strategic and structured intervention represented by the QEP. The quality of students' writing is an AUD issue, and the QEP – born from assessment and integrated into AUD's IE processes committed to continuous improvement – represents a major opportunity for impacting the institution in a substantive way.

The QEP Steering Committee has been critical to the management of the topic, focus and title-selection processes, in addition to the setting of objectives. This Committee subsequently combined with the QEP Development Team to craft appropriate student learning outcomes, conduct a literature review for purposes of identifying best practices, determine the QEP treatment, devise the assessment plan and design a critical path of activities and timing that would govern plan development and implementation. The composition of both the Steering Committee and the Development Team reflect broad-scale diversity in terms of position, rank and discipline within AUD and included student representation. The organizational structure for managing the QEP was born from the deliberations of the Development Team. So, too, was the definition of the funding required to support the human and other resource involved in effective and sustainable plan implementation. Special attention has been given to ensuring the availability of adequate time on the part of human resource and appropriate (kind/amount) faculty development in delivering writing instruction and assessing student performance in writing. The university's CEO (President) has approved the QEP budget covering five years of activity.

The delivery of the QEP treatment will take place in ENGL 100 (Developmental English) through ENGL 101 (Composition and Rhetoric) and conclude with ENGL 102 (Advanced Composition and Research). The treatment consists of significant changes in "the way things are done," pedagogically and logistically (e.g., class scheduling, size and the use of the Writing Center). Student writing skills are then tracked through required courses in the Arts and Sciences Core (ENGL 103, Introduction to Literature; WLDC 201, World Cultures I; and WLDC 202, World Cultures II; as well as in writing-intensive (WI) courses identified in each degree program, a Junior Year Writing Test, and in the writing-specific items of the AUD Exit Exam.

The single-minded focus of AUD's QEP is improved student writing. The learning outcomes developed relate to student writing and pedagogical effectiveness. It is only natural, therefore, that the QEP assessment plan describe the what, how and when of assessment of student writing. At the level of conjecture, however, and in the spirit of creativity and a desire to maximize the potential of the QEP's impact, additional analysis will be performed on institutional data to determine whether a positive relationship between improved writing skills and improvement in overall academic achievement does indeed exist. The QEP's title, "Writing as a Pillar of Academic Achievement," synthesizes the tangible improvement in writing expected with an element of what is referred to as "higher order impact."