

## **Write Well, Think Well: Toward a Culture of Writing**

### **University of St. Thomas - Houston**

The University of St. Thomas (UST) developed its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to seamlessly integrate student affairs with a cross disciplinary approach to improving student writing. The QEP aligns with the mission, strategic plan and educational outcomes of the institution.

University and national data, along with a review of germane literature, supplemented feedback from faculty, administrators and students. The resulting analyses from these sources supported the QEP's goals for student writing, and the need for a systematic approach to improve student writing.

**High Impact Educational Practices (HIEP):** There are four HIEPs at the heart of our QEP:

1. **Common Intellectual Experiences:** All students will be directed to discipline-specific student learning outcomes for writing in all departments at UST.
2. **Learning Communities:** A new student group, the Aquinas Writing Scholars, was formed in the fall of 2015 with thirty first-time freshmen. The group meets twice a month and engages in writing exercises at each meeting, and will take part in an intensive writing workshop once every spring semester.
3. **Writing Intensive Courses:** Our QEP establishes nine standards for Writing Intensive courses. At least one course in every discipline will have to meet these standards.
4. **Service/Community-Based Learning:** All of the Aquinas Writing Scholars will complete a service-learning project.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** All academic departments will develop discipline-specific writing outcomes and means of assessing them. These discipline-specific writing outcomes are aligned with, and based on, the University's Core Curriculum Goal 5: To develop competence in critical thinking, critical reading, effective writing, and oral communication in necessary relation to the skills of gathering, interpreting, synthesizing, and presenting information with integrity and clarity. The English department has implemented and assessed writing outcomes for Core Goal 5 for each of their core classes. All other academic departments will base their writing outcomes on those implemented by the English department:

1. Students will demonstrate ability to reason critically.
2. Students will demonstrate ability to read critically.
3. Students will write a paper that meets the standards for academic communication.
4. Students will present a speech or other example of oral communication that meets the standards for academic communication.
5. Students will gather, interpret, synthesize, and present information in written form meeting the standards of academic communication.
6. Students will gather, interpret, synthesize, and present information in oral form meeting the standards of academic communication.

The QEP director will facilitate assessment workshops for academic departments to develop writing outcomes and assess those outcomes. Student writing outcomes will be regularly assessed as part of the continuing UST Core Goals Assessment Cycle.

Additional assessment of writing outcomes will be done in the Philosophy and Theology departments. These two departments have coordinated the student learning outcomes for writing throughout their six core courses. This clustering of coordinated outcomes between two departments will be assessed to determine if it improved the writing outcomes of students significantly more than courses that did not coordinate their learning outcomes with another department.

In addition to the components outlined above, the UST QEP includes modifications to its Introduction to Academic Writing course, which now has its own resident tutor, and a new writing placement test, which we will begin to use in the fall of 2016.

Please contact Dr. Stephen Striby, QEP Director, for additional information: [stribys@stthom.edu](mailto:stribys@stthom.edu)