

Wilkes Community College (WCC), Wilkesboro, North Carolina

Quality Enhancement Plan: Preparing WCC for Online Success

WCC begins official implementation during fall 2016 of its QEP focused on online success guided by the overarching goals of **offering quality courses** and **increasing the online completion rate**.

Data most influential in the topic decision included the 20% gap between face-to-face course completion rates and online course completion rates. Additional data gathered during early 2014 helped WCC narrow its focus to the concept of preparing faculty and students for online course success based on three major components: student online readiness, professional development, and academic support.

Historically, WCC has offered students no support to develop success skills for online courses and has not given any pre-assessment to measure students' readiness to take online courses. A student readiness experience through WCC's learning management system has been developed and will reach new WCC students during fall 2016. The experience was piloted and improved during spring and summer 2016 and includes three modules: How to be Successful in an Online Course, What to Expect in an Online Course, and Computer Skills/Moodle. A 20-question assessment provides data on students' readiness to take online courses.

Institutionally, WCC has not offered instructors online pedagogical training aligned with quality standards. From 2014-16, an instructor-led Online Standards Team and later a Peer Mentor group developed and refined a rubric to be used in professional development, course review, and instructor online certification. By the time the QEP is fully implemented in 2021, all WCC instructors who teach online will be certified to do so which means they have participated in professional development, experienced a successful online course review, and engaged students in online activities. One QEP leader commented, "Certified online instructors will teach quality courses."

QEP professional development involves a "learning community" approach WCC determined to be effective with new faculty in early 2014. Experienced online instructors trained as Peer Mentors during 2015-16 will lead learning communities of five-six instructors for one or two semester experiences, depending upon instructors' online teaching experience. The QEP learning communities officially begin fall 2016. A pilot project involving QEP Peer Mentors demonstrated that revising engagement strategies in online courses can impact student performance.

In addition to the two QEP goals, QEP data gathering and analysis involve four student learning outcomes: (1) average student performance on targeted online assignments will increase; (2) students new to online courses will be aware of online course success skills; (3) students in college success courses (ACA) will demonstrate an understanding of time management strategies and how to apply them academically; and (4) students in college success courses (ACA) will demonstrate online success skills.

Finally, WCC online students have had limited access to online academic support. A third QEP component involves WCC's affiliation with Thinking Storm tutoring services so that online students will have increased opportunities for tutoring support.

For more information, please contact: Jan Huggins, QEP Director, jan.huggins@wilkescc.edu