

Research conducted at the national level by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2015) and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2016) points to the following solid conclusion: soft skills education is of paramount importance. The term “soft skills” encompasses a wide variety of aptitudes such as competent communication, teamwork, professionalism, and a strong work ethic. Surveys of college professionals and industry leaders confirm that these skills are highly valued, and that instruction in soft skills plays a vital role in providing a vibrant, impactful college education.

Shelton State Community College finds similar responses at the local level. When polling College faculty and staff, as well as industry leaders in the surrounding community, soft skills emerge as a principal area of concern. As stated on the College’s website, part of the mission of Shelton State Community College is to provide the community with “learning opportunities to advance academic excellence, cultural enrichment, workforce training, and economic development” (Shelton State Community College, 2018). Addressing soft skills that fall outside traditional academic pursuits but are necessary for future career success aligns with that mission.

Shelton State’s mission combined with quantitative and qualitative data at the local and national level provides the foundation for the College’s Quality Enhancement Plan: *REALSKILL: Education that Prepares*. The specific skills addressed are *decision making, personal responsibility in the form of self-motivation and work ethic, and professional communication*. Shelton State’s college orientation course (ORI101) and Career Services will facilitate instruction through SkillsUSA *Advanced Experiences*. *Advanced Experiences* will provide instruction, pre- and post-tests, authentic project-based experiences, and earned badges to prepare students for the *Career-Ready Assessment*. Upon satisfactory completion of the *Advanced Experiences* and *Career-Ready Assessment*, students will earn the *Career Essentials Credential* from the nationally recognized, industry-supported SkillsUSA organization.

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