

Students Connected: Fieldwork for the Future
University of South Carolina Beaufort
Executive Summary

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for the University of South Carolina Beaufort (USCB) focuses on improving students' learning through experiential education rooted in community issues. *Students Connected: Fieldwork for the Future* is the result of broad-based input. This program is closely tied with the University's values and mission as well as goals set forth in the USCB Strategic Plan for broadening experiential opportunities for students, growing partnerships with community organizations, and providing for students' success.

Students Connected is a University-wide program that will inspire students to contribute to the needs of their community through focus on three central goals:

- (1) Enhance and expand experiential research and service-learning opportunities for students across all disciplines,
- (2) Collaborate with local organizations to engage students in research that affects community-based project outcomes, and
- (3) Integrate knowledge learned from these experiences into curricula and facilitate classroom and community-wide discussions.

This QEP involves implementation of three central initiatives:

First, *Students Connected* courses allow achievement of the SLOs throughout students' academic careers. In foundational courses, including introductions to a discipline and general education courses, students begin learning their roles in the larger community as faculty engage them in more specifically considering local issues. In traditional experiential learning courses, such as internships, field research, or service-learning courses, students explore an issue in more depth by addressing it through their real-world experience. Newly implemented community-partnered courses create collaborations between students, faculty, and local organizations where students study issues identified by the community partners, research possible solutions to them, and implement their solutions through work with these partners. Structured reflection and discussion are part of all levels of courses.

Second, students develop portfolios that demonstrates their accomplishment of the SLOs and make community presentations of their experiences, which allows them to achieve Graduation with Leadership Distinction in Community Engagement.

Third, faculty development programs provide faculty with understanding of not only how to transform existing courses into *Students Connected* courses but also how to impact students' learning by adapting best practices for experiential education. Faculty participating in development opportunities and integrating *Students Connected* SLOs in their courses will have the opportunity to be recognized as Faculty Fellows.

USCB's QEP, *Students Connected*, will transform students' learning, the experience students and faculty have in the classroom, and the impact the University has on the community. USCB is committed to supporting *Students Connected* through training, financial support, fostering of community partnerships, and recognition of outstanding contributions.

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