

## **QEP Executive Summary: First-Year Experience: Connect. Engage. Succeed. Volunteer State Community College**

Volunteer State Community College's (VSCC) Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is designed to empower students to transition smoothly to college life, succeed academically, and become engaged members of the community and workforce. Focusing on establishing and developing student's connections to faculty, staff, and fellow students, and fostering a sense of belonging through the development and implementation of a First-Year Experience (FYE), VSCC's QEP seeks to advance the college's mission and strategic goals of student success through increased persistence and retention rates for first time freshman.

VSCC utilized its ongoing and comprehensive planning and evaluation process, as well as campus-wide input to narrow its focus to the development of the FYE. A thorough review of the current literature and FYE best practices revealed that opportunities for connection and belonging are key indicators for increased retention and persistence (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009). This research led to the development of the three key components of VSCC's FYE: 1) Campus Connect: Smaller, student-led orientation sessions with opportunities for new students to engage with current students and one another while learning about available resources and support. 2) Discovery Days: A campus-wide initiative focused on providing engagement opportunities throughout the first six weeks of each semester. Leveraging existing student activities and adding targeted programming, this component aims to increase connection to faculty, staff, and other students. 3) FYEX 1030 and FYEX 1040: Two 1.5-credit hour courses designed to prepare students for success both in and out of the classroom through a focus on academic success and career readiness strategies. Through these three components, VSCC's QEP will provide opportunities for connection, promote a sense of belonging, and foster a mindset of self-awareness and well-being.

Broad-based support for the program has been fostered through focus groups and the composition of the development and implementation committees and task forces for each component throughout implementation. Through purposeful design, the membership of these committees and task forces were selected from various divisions and departments to provide a diverse representation in order to develop and implement a QEP that will impact the college as a whole and provide the support needed for a more intentional focus on student success.

VSCC's QEP intends to look at student success through the development of a sense of belonging and connection, fostering community through involvement in and exposure to campus culture, and specific learning outcomes for academic success and career readiness. To assess the achievement of student-learning outcomes and the overall student success goals, specific measures and means to collect data were developed. As the QEP pieces are piloted for full implementation, the assessment strategy will focus on gathering data and conducting analysis to guide the implementation process. An assessment team will regularly review data and recommend changes as necessary.

In support of VSCC's QEP, the college has developed a budget to ensure institutional capacity for the sustainability of the QEP and is dedicating resources towards personnel, faculty and staff development, marketing, assessment, and operating expenses. This commitment to student success is at the heart of VSCC's strategic goals and will help push forward the successful implementation of the FYE.