

Executive Summary
Aquinas College Quality Enhancement Plan
Education in Communion

The Aquinas College Quality Enhancement Plan *Education in Communion* will extend the mission of the College through a more deliberate preparation of future educators in Catholic-Christian anthropology. In particular, principles first elaborated by the College's patron, Saint Thomas Aquinas, will be applied to contemporary challenges related to socialemotional learning in K-12 classrooms. The relatively small size of Aquinas College and the focus on academic programs leading to education licensure provides a unique opportunity to equip graduates with pedagogical knowledge and skills that will "... serve others, and engage culture in Truth and Charity (Aquinas College Strategic Plan, 2019-2025)."

A QEP Committee formed in August 2019 thoroughly reviewed Aquinas' strategic plan, *Sent to Witness*, to commence topic development. *Sent to Witness* engaged multiple and diverse Aquinas constituencies who overwhelmingly articulated a need for educators to be prepared in the Catholic liberal arts tradition, especially as it relates to Christian anthropological principles elucidated by St. Thomas Aquinas and applied in the field of education. Reviews of academic literature and best practices conducted by the QEP committee confirmed this need. In support of this, the School of Education data and surveys revealed opportunities to improve how educators manage student behavior in the context of their classrooms. The convergence of these inputs suggested that there is a need for the programs in education to address contemporary cultural challenges by equipping teachers not only with academic content knowledge but also with the tools to help students in their classroom to process emotions and engage in social interactions. The *Education in Communion* QEP, then, identifies a single goal: **form educators to use a Thomistic anthropology to foster social and emotional learning.** *Education in Communion's* goal is supported by seven student outcomes that reflect the integration of contemporary educational theories related to social and emotional learning with the Catholic-Christian conception of man as created in the image and likeness of God.

The QEP goal and student learning outcomes will be achieved by using a Thomistic approach to social and emotional learning. Educational and psychosocial sciences have provided important insights concerning the positive outcomes of social emotional skills in children. However, these have often come from a reductionist framework and the methods employed cannot explore the whole of the human person, especially the spiritual origins of human life. The programs of study leading to educational licensure will be adapted to take this into account. All Aquinas initial licensure students will first receive foundational content in introductory courses that explore the Thomistic conception of the human person. Courses in education and psychology taken later in the programs will be modified to require students to build upon this foundation and to consider how principles of Thomistic anthropology inform theories of pedagogical practice. These newly-modified courses in educational theory will then be applied in actual classroom settings as Aquinas teacher candidates advance through their programs of study. Assessment occurs in three stages as teacher candidates progress through their programs. The *Education in Communion Instrument*, developed and validated by members of the QEP, includes three observable characteristics for each of the seven student outcomes. In theoretical courses, students will be expected to demonstrate their understanding of the observable characteristics. In application courses, the Instrument will be applied to determine the extent to which the characteristics are evident in the students' practice.

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