



MESA: Making Education Student-Focused and Achievable **South Carolina State University**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Carolina State University (SC State) has adopted a Quality Enhancement Plan, MESA: Making Education Student-Focused & Achievable, with a focus on student success by improving retention rates. This QEP is the result of more than two years of study and planning by a broad base of SC State stakeholders who identified the need for a multi-pronged approach to improving retention. The primary audience of the QEP are freshmen and students who are engaged in general education curriculum (GEC) courses at the University. “Mesa” is the Spanish word for table. Thus, with the QEP, the University is "Setting the Table for Student Success." This motto encourages students, faculty, and staff to participate in the success of students and in the success of the University itself.

Understanding that improving student retention must be addressed on multiple fronts, MESA incorporates engagement from faculty, students, and student support services staff to ensure that key stakeholders have a role to play in achieving the goals and outcomes of the QEP. MESA addresses student success in a three-pronged approach.

1. *Infusing Active Learning Strategies in GEC Courses*—training faculty in pedagogical strategies and equipping them to use those strategies will lead to enhancing the engagement of students in the classroom.
2. *Revamping the University 101 (Introduction to the University) Course*—changing the sequence and scope of the course’s curriculum exposes students to the knowledge and skills needed to be successful learners early in the course.
3. *Providing Early Intervention for At-Risk Students*—identifying those students who have challenges inside and outside the classroom and providing them with the help they need.

While the QEP’s start date is Fall 2020, the University has already begun to make changes to the University 101 course and its early intervention strategies in the 2019-2020 academic year. The study skills and other student success strategies were moved to the first few weeks of the course instead of topics such as the history of the University. In addition, faculty began using Beacon, a Campus Labs software module that allows them to send alerts to the Student Success and Retention Program staff so that they can follow up with students who demonstrate poor academic performance.

Building on that foundation, in Year One of MESA, a small cohort of GEC and University 101 instructors will be trained in active learning strategies. In Year Two and Year Three, larger cohorts of GEC faculty will join their colleagues in hands-on pedagogical training. This training will include a plan of action to deploy and assess the strategies and a clear understanding of the logistics of data collection to measure improvement over the duration of the QEP.

Formative and summative assessments will be used to gauge the success of the QEP. Formative assessments will be administered to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of active learning strategies in the classroom. In addition, the use of student support services will be assessed to determine if the frequency of use correlates with improved retention rates. Finally, the fall-to-fall retention rate for first-time, full-time freshmen, as well as the overall retention rate of the University will serve as the summative assessment of the success of MESA.

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