

**From:** Sue Westbrook  
**To:** fac,stf  
**Date:** 6/21/04 4:12PM  
**Subject:** Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Survey

Dear NSU Faculty, Staff and Administrators:

As you may be aware, Core Requirement 2.12 of the current COC/SACS Principles requires NSU to “develop an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and demonstrate that the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process.” Members of the COC/SACS leadership team have recently returned from the official COC/SACS orientation session held in Atlanta. At this session we were asked to submit a brief summary of a description of our focus for the QEP by July 15, 2004. Although this was an unexpected request and our COC/SACS advisor assures us that we do not have to offer a definitive proposal on July 15, with your assistance, we’d like to identify some issues that could be suggested as possible QEP topics. Therefore, we would greatly appreciate your input via the attached [survey](#) with a submittal deadline of July 6, 2004.

The survey is designed to obtain faculty, staff, and administrator input. Department Heads should take the administrator version of the survey.

The Commission on Colleges describes four major components of the QEP:

- 1) Focus. NSU must identify an overall theme and critical issue(s) related to student learning and justify its use. An argument or case must be made for the selected theme and critical issue. We must provide relevant goals and objectives and demonstrate how the plan will improve the learning environment of OUR students. Hence, the issue must be related to our Mission and Strategic Goals.
- 2) Institutional Capability and the Initiation/Continuation of the Plan. NSU must provide evidence that we have sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP. An Impact Report must be submitted to COC/SACS 5 years after implementation of the QEP evaluating its effectiveness.
- 3) Assessment. NSU must demonstrate we have the means for determining the success of the plan. (For example, evidence of changes in learning; measureable outcomes.)
- 4) Broad-based Community Involvement. NSU must demonstrate that all aspects of our community were involved in the development of the QEP.

This past year the COC/SACS leadership team has been informally brainstorming possible issues that might be addressed by our QEP. Attached is a description of three possible themes/critical issues that have been generated and a brief analysis of why each is important to our students. NOTE THAT POSSIBLE QEP TOPICS ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE ISSUES LISTED; rather, we wanted to get the “conversation” started with everyone by presenting some ideas and encouraging everyone to offer their

suggestions as well. The Leadership Team will compile your responses to the survey and use these responses to continue this discussion at our Fall Faculty Institute.

The QEP Survey has been compiled in Blackboard. You can access the Blackboard log in screen by clicking on this link: <http://blackboard.nicholls.edu>. If you are new to Blackboard, use the attached document for instructions on how to access the QEP Survey in Blackboard or contact Dian Leger at extension 4673 or by email.

Thank you so much for your cooperation with this survey and prompt response. Your input is valued.

Sincerely,

Sue Westbrook, Chair QEP

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**Name:** QEP Survey for Faculty

**Instructions:** Read and rank the following options for a potential theme and critical issue for NSU's QEP on the basis of:  
 1)does it flow from NSU's mission and strategic plan  
 2)will it improve student learning  
 3)does it reflect a need unique to our University and community served  
 4)is it quantifiable/ measurable and doable  
 5)is it realistic in terms of resources, including faculty and fiscal resources for implementing initiatives  
 6)which theme/critical issue would interest you the most to be part of implementing as the University QEP  
 Additionally, to view the case or argument made in support of each theme/critical issue, click on the corresponding link below.

**Multiple Attempts:** NOT ALLOWED. This survey may only be taken once.

**Force Completion:** This survey may be saved and resumed later.

**Question 1 Ordering** **1 points**

Please rank the following themes and critical issues for the QEP on a scale of 1-3 with 1 = highest or most preferred and 3 = lowest or least preferred.

QEP Theme: Enhancing the First Year Experience; Critical Issue: Knowledge in General Education (e.g. Math, English, History); [Argument to Support QEP Enhancing the First Year Experience.doc](#)

QEP Theme: Engagement; Critical Issue: Value of Volunteerism and Service Learning; [Argument for QEP Theme Engagement-Service Learning.doc](#)

QEP Theme: Globalization; Critical Issue: Knowledge of Global Issues; [Argument for QEP Theme Globalization.doc](#)

**Question 2 Essay** **1 points**

Other: Please feel free to use the space below to describe any other theme and/or critical issue to be considered for the QEP.

**ARGUMENT/ CASE FOR QEP THEME: Enhancing the First-Year Experience**

Since the inception of Harvard University in the earliest days of our American history, the focus of United States higher education has swung, like a pendulum, between the extremes of a broad-based, strong liberal arts, “general” education and a specialized, major area of study, or “specific” education. For the last several decades, the latter has been more pronounced, but, more recently, the pendulum has begun to swing back to a more general education focus. To wit, we have in LA public universities since 1997 mandated “general education” requirements and conducted “general education” testing.

Unfortunately, many upper division collegiate students (juniors and seniors) across the country still lack post-secondary level verbal and quantitative skills and even basic “citizen” knowledge (e.g., Columbus sailed America in 1492, that the House of Representatives has more members than the Senate, etc.). This is also the case at Nicholls State University, as is evident in the

consistently low General Education Test scores, and the consistently low student retention and graduation rates, among other variables.

NSU is moving from being a Tier IV to a Tier III school, from being an open admissions university to a selective admissions university as of Fall 2005. However, the current mission of NSU states that it “commits itself to offering an excellent comprehensive education that meets the needs of the communities it serves” and “strives to achieve accreditation in all eligible programs.” Although we have succeeded on the latter, we need improvement on the former. Why? Because we have focused on “specific” education for a minority of students (e.g., business, education, nursing etc.) rather than on broad-based “general” education for all students. This is why the “special” education students have far greater retention and graduation rates than the general NSU student body.

In addition, the typical student entering NSU is the first in his/her family to attend college. Most of our students attended the public elementary and secondary schools in our State. Deficiencies in this system have historically led to low averages on ACT/SAT scores. This is the community we serve, and more selective admissions will not change our community; possibly, our community will become somewhat smaller.

Solutions? The QEP should re-direct the focus of NSU to a quality, broad-based, comprehensive education as stipulated by the mission statement. Right now [witness the General Education Test (GET) scores] many upper division students at NSU have weak verbal, quantitative, and “citizen” skills. Why? They are capable of learning; however, the system has failed them. Witness the large, over-sized classes in English, Math, and History, etc., with, frequently the least experienced or adjunct faculty. Consequently, we end up with juniors and seniors at NSU with limited (i.e., not collegiate level) verbal, quantitative, and “citizen” skills who have already completed all of these and other general education courses, oftentimes with grades of “A” or “B”.

The NSU QEP should re-direct NSU to honoring its mission of providing a quality, comprehensive education to its community. Indices of success would be higher GET scores and retention/graduation rates, among others. The “special” programs—business, education, nursing etc.- will remain functional, accredited programs with high retention/graduation rates, but will be complemented by higher quality “general” education programs from admission through graduation. That is quality, quality enhancement; this plan will best fulfill the mission of our University, best nurture students in a selective admission process, and best serve our community.

#### ARGUMENT FOR QEP THEME – Engagement/ Volunteerism and Service Learning

Since the inception of public elementary and secondary education in the United States, a focus has been to educate students in basic skills (verbal, quantitative, etc.) to prepare them to be good citizens in the society. Since the inception of post-secondary (aka “higher”) education in the United States, a focus has been to facilitate the development and mastery of advanced bodies of knowledge in all disciplines (aka “majors”) to prepare students to be not only model citizens in the society, but also to serve and lead the society. Hence, historically in American higher education, the learning has preceded the service.

But what about “service learning” where, through service, the student concurrently learns? Instead of educating the student to serve the society primarily after graduation—

aka “learn to serve”—why not complement that process prior to graduation by having the student engage the society—aka “serve to learn”? The mission of our University dictates that NSU “commits itself to offering an excellent comprehensive education that meets the needs of the communities it serves...through service”. Hence, we are mandated by our current mission to promote education through service (aka “service learning”).

To achieve this, faculty and students across all disciplines/majors would have to more closely collaborate in both learning and service activities for our community. Small groups of faculty and students (e.g., 2-3 faculty, 10-15 students, for a total of 12-18 per group) could be formed to examine societal service needs, devise a means (a “service project”) to meet/fulfill these needs, and implement that project as a “learning activity” for both students and faculty. The University could have a “clearinghouse” for these groups to assist each group, facilitate the communication and interaction between groups, and minimize overlap in service learning activities. Possibly, faculty and administrators could be placed “in residence” (the U. of VA/Thomas Jefferson model) to further nurture this process by working with students on campus evenings and weekends.

Each service learning activity would give specific behavior objectives. The evaluation of the fulfillment of said objectives would constitute the collective evaluation of this service learning education enhancement. More generally, the sheer quantity of these projects (in comparison to the current baseline) and faculty/student evaluations of them would be further indices of this educational enhancement.

Service learning is central to the mission of any institution of higher education in the USA; Nicholls is no exception to that rule. Hence, we can enhance the quality of the Nicholls’ educational experience by enhancing our student-faculty service to the society by promoting service learning. Nicholls’ students engaged in society today will become Nicholls’ graduates serving and leading the society.

#### ARGUMENT/CASE FOR QEP THEME: Enhancing Student Learning of Global Issues.

U.S. citizens are quite aware of the fact that we have become part of a global village and a global economy. None of us are insulated from the effects of foreign markets and competition, and many of us are embracing the opportunities offered by this globalization. Failure to take a global perspective is one of the biggest mistakes Americans can make.

In response to this changing landscape of our society and economy, “cultural and global understanding” are recurrent themes throughout Nicholls State University’s 2001-2005 Strategic Plan. Specifically, the mission of Academic Affairs states that, “Students at Nicholls receive a broad knowledge base emphasizing cultural and global understanding and personal and social responsibility.” Strategic Goal 1.H calls for the University to “Encourage the expansion and development of programs which meet the needs of the region and promote global awareness,” and Strategic Goal 3-D calls for us to, “Provide

opportunities for increased internationalization of the academic experience.”

Although the University has expressed concern for student learning in the arena of global issues, recent surveys of student perceptions indicate they may not be as cognizant of global issues as they should be. The NSU QEP should focus on enhancing student’s global awareness and learning strategies for working and living in a global environment. The plan should call for faculty to work together to develop specific learning objectives and develop pedagogy and strategy to integrate this learning into the general education curriculum and all other programs. Pre-tests and post-tests could be developed to assess student learning and follow up surveys can be administered to compare student perception to past survey results.