

Samford University Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) FAQ

Level-Up: Transformative Learning through Powerful Assignments

What is a QEP?

The QEP is a core requirement by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SAACSCOC) as part of the university's reaccreditation process. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted four to six weeks in advance of the on-site committee's review, is a document developed by the institution that (1) includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.

For more from SACSCOC: <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2012PrinciplesOfAcrcditation.pdf>

How is this project linked to Samford's mission and values?

The mission of Samford University is to nurture persons in their development of intellect, creativity, faith and personhood. As a Christian university, the community fosters academic, career and ethical competency while encouraging social and civic responsibility and service to others. This initiative focuses on the intellectual development of students as well as academic, career, and ethical competency. In addition, Samford's Vision includes an emphasis on innovation in teaching and learning combined with rigorous self-assessment.

How is this project tied to Samford's strategic plan?

The first of four major strategies in Samford's plan calls for an emphasis on student success. Within this area there are three specific foci which include:

1. Create a remarkable environment for teaching and learning
2. Nourish and recruit a faculty and staff committed to exceptional standards for learning
3. Design and offer experiences that expand and illuminate traditional learning

The QEP has the potential to impact all three of these areas in a positive way.

What is the vision of the QEP?

To improve student learning at Samford University by investing in targeted teaching or professional development

Imagine a campus where.....

1. Faculty partner together to develop more powerful assignments
2. Staff expertise is incorporated into assignment development
3. Faculty are provided an opportunity to blend their subject expertise with increased awareness of critical thinking, metacognition, assignment design, and assessment.
4. High impact practices are built into all academic programs.
5. Class assignments are aligned with program and university learning goals
6. Student learning is assessed through their work on assignments
7. Opportunities for critical thinking are incorporated into assignments
8. Information literacy skills are developed through carefully designed assignments

What are faculty learning goals?

Faculty will work collaboratively to develop assignments that integrate critical thinking, information literacy, and metacognition along with disciplinary content to create powerful learning experiences for students.

What are student learning goals?

Student learning goals will focus on critical thinking, information literacy, and metacognition.

How did this project develop and evolve?

The project was initially one of 17 submitted in the general call for QEP proposals. Five proposals were selected for further development, and from those 5, two were selected by a panel of faculty, staff, and administrators. The two proposals, one focused on an expanded CTLS and one on the development of a Learning Commons had equal interest and support from the reviewing faculty body. Both teams were asked to review their proposals as well as institutional and assessment data to assist in identifying a single proposal that captured the core of their proposals. This is the result of that collaboration.

Why the focus on assignments?

The focus on assignments honors the disciplinary knowledge that faculty bring to the classroom and helps create practical tools that can be implemented in anyone's class. The assignments currently employed can be revised to better incorporate and scaffold critical thinking and information literacy outcomes, and these powerful assignments can serve as a model for others to implement.

What are Powerful Assignments?

The notion of powerful assignments comes from an initiative from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) and it is based on the idea that faculty working together can create more powerful learning experiences for students and for each other. Some of the key characteristics include:

- Intentional: Good assignments are designed with outcomes in mind. Think backwards design.
- Clear to students: Decode the discipline for students. Faculty are so immersed in the field that they often cannot see the assignment through their students' eyes
- Engaging: "Task as intriguing problem." Unscripted. Pose a real-life problem that captures students' interest
- Respectful of and reflecting students' knowledge and cultural wealth: equity minded
- Requiring formative feedback
- Scaffolded: Offering appropriate preparation and guidance
- Linked with other assignments. An assignment is not an island! Assignments can relate to each other, even across classes and years, to create a more coherent learning pathway.
- Assist faculty in showing the link between my work" to "our curriculum."

For more information about Powerful assignments see:

http://degreeprofile.org/press_four/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Designing-Effective-Classroom-Assignments-Intellectual-Work-Worth-Sharing-Change-Magazine.pdf

Will there be a standard template for assignments?

An assignment should have several key components including:

- The assignment should clearly specify the central task that must be undertaken
- An assignment should indicate how the required task is to be undertaken and the results communicated
- The assignment should indicate how extensive or evidential the response should be.

Will this initiative be tied to a particular method or approach to teaching?

No, but ideally will model best practices that include active learning, critical thinking, and meaningful feedback and can show attainment of stated QEP learning outcomes

Can this be applied to a variety of disciplines?

Absolutely

Isn't this really just a way to evaluate my effectiveness as a teacher?

The results from this project will be evaluated at a university-wide scale to determine the impact of focused professional development on student learning outcomes related to critical thinking and information literacy. , Faculty will not be evaluated on an individual basis as part of the QEP

Why the focus on student learning?

SACSCOC states that student learning be the primary focus of any QEP.

How will the QEP be evaluated?

An on-site committee, made up of volunteer peers from similar institutions, is formed by SACSCOC. These evaluators will review the proposal in February and then conduct an on-campus site visit in March. They will base their evaluation on the following rubric:

QEP evaluation guidelines can be found here:

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Quality%20Enhancement%20Plan%20Guidelines.pdf>

What is expected of faculty?

Faculty will have an opportunity to bring their experience and disciplinary knowledge into a collaborative setting with colleagues where assignments can be shared, critiqued, and revised. The collaborative process is a key component of making teaching a more public activity as well as helping to align learning between courses and programs.

What is expected of Departments?

Departments may wish to engage their faculty in a collaborative exercise to align assignments within various courses within their respective programs.

What is expected of students?

Students will encounter assignments that are better integrated with and across their courses of study, clearly focused with explicit learning outcomes, and intentionally designed to enhance their critical thinking and information literacy skills. The goal is not more work, but better focused, better designed work that demonstrates their learning and skill acquisition.

Why the initial focus on the Core?

Every freshman at Samford takes UCCA, UCCP, and UCBP. The potential for impact is greater here than in any other series of courses. The foundation for more effective thinking can be established in the core

and then expanded throughout the curriculum. In addition, core faculty have already established collaborative relationships through a pilot program conducted in June 2016.

Can graduate programs be involved?

The initial project will begin with Core classes, then expand to selected discipline-based courses. Graduate-level courses will(could?) eventually become part of the initiative

What is the significance of “Level-Up”?

The level-up metaphor comes from interactive games like Pokemon Go, where improved skills are acknowledged through increased levels of achievement. Level up is a recognition that we all seek to do our jobs more effectively—regardless of where we begin. The concept can be linked to Bloom’s taxonomy and higher levels of thinking. The VALUE rubrics associated with the AAC&U LEAP initiative also include a levels of accomplishment that range from benchmark to capstone—each signifying an increased level of understanding. The level up is an exhortation not an accusation. “The spiritual gift of exhortation is often called the gift of encouragement. The Greek word for this gift is Parakaleo. It means to beseech, exhort, and call upon, to encourage and to strengthen”.

<http://www.spiritualgiftstest.com/spiritual-gifts#Exhortation>