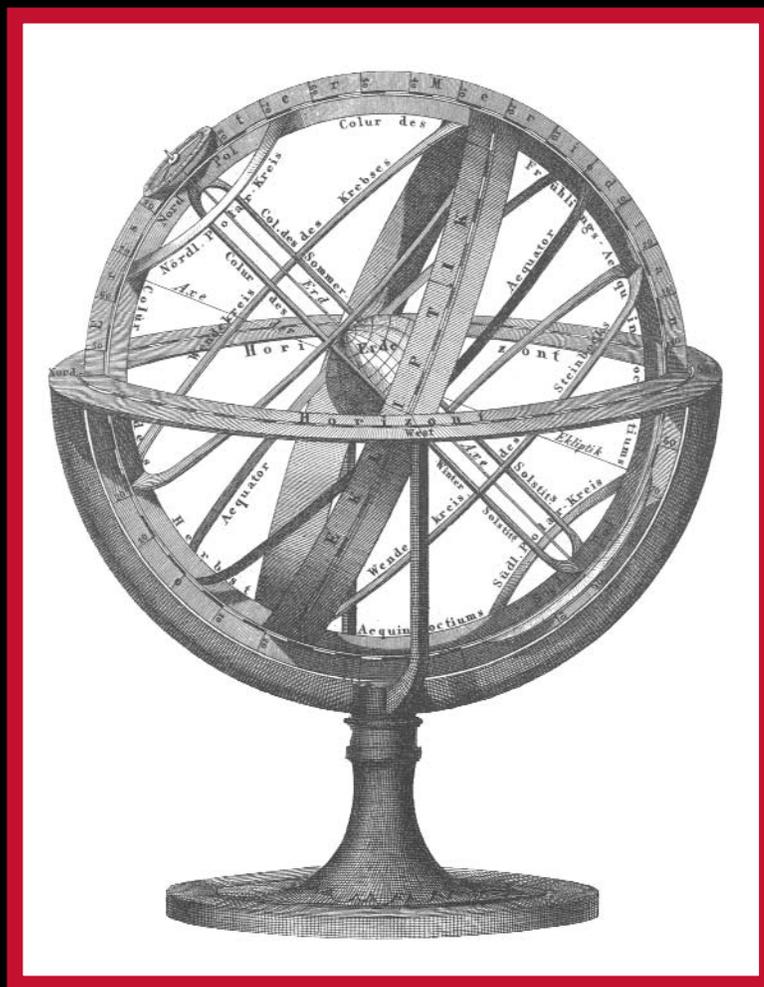


HANDBOOK FOR REVIEW COMMITTEES



SECOND EDITION



Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges

Assessing the Quality Enhancement Plan

The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses one or more critical issues related to enhancing student learning. The QEP should complement the institution's ongoing integrated institution-wide planning and evaluation process and is not intended to supplant or replace the processes described in Core Requirement 2.5 and Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1. On the contrary, the topic or issue identified for the QEP may very well evolve from these existing processes, as well as from other issues stemming from the institution's internal reaffirmation review.

While many aspects of the accreditation process focus on the past and the present, the QEP is “forward-looking” and thus transforms the process into an ongoing activity rather than an episodic event. Core Requirement 2.12 requires an institution to have a plan for increasing the effectiveness of some aspect of its educational program relating to student learning. The plan launches a process that can move the institution into a future characterized by creative, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences for students.

Student learning is defined broadly in the context of the QEP and may address a wide range of topics or issues. Student learning may include changes in students' knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values that may be attributable to the collegiate experience. Examples of topics or issues include, but are not limited to, enhancing the academic climate for student learning, strengthening the general studies curriculum, developing creative approaches to experiential learning, enhancing critical thinking skills, introducing innovative teaching and learning strategies, increasing student engagement in learning, and exploring imaginative ways to use technology in the curriculum. In all cases, the goals and evaluation strategies must be clearly linked to improving the quality of student learning.

The QEP is a significant component of the reaffirmation process, and members of the on-site committee should therefore seek validation of the institution's commitment to the QEP through the evidence presented by the institution concerning:

- A consensus among key constituency groups that the QEP, rather than being merely a requirement for reaffirmation of accreditation, can result in significant, even transforming, improvements in the quality of student learning.

Conducting the Assessment of the Quality Enhancement Plan

- Broad-based institutional participation in the identification of the topic or issue to be addressed by the QEP.
- Careful review of best practices related to the topic or issue.
- Allocation of adequate human and financial resources to develop, implement, and sustain the QEP.
- Implementation strategies that include a clear timeline and assignment of responsibilities.
- A structure established for evaluating the extent to which the goals set for the plan are attained.

In assessing the QEP, you should consider that it will include but is not limited to the following components:

- A brief descriptive title.
- A topic that is creative and vital to the long-term improvement of student learning.
- A definition of student learning appropriate to the focus of the QEP.
- Evidence that developing the QEP has engaged all appropriate campus constituencies.
- A description of the importance of the QEP that will help you and others understand its value and appropriateness to the institution.
- Specific, well-defined goals related to an issue of substance and depth, expected to lead to observable results.
- Evidence of careful analysis of the institutional context in which the goals will be implemented and of consideration of best practices related to the QEP's topic or issues.
- A viable implementation plan that includes necessary resources and a framework that details matters such as:
 - timelines,
 - leadership,
 - resource allocation, and
 - assessment schedule.

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- A comprehensive evaluation plan clearly related to the QEP goals, with the latitude and flexibility to make adjustments to achieve the desired student learning outcomes.
 - Appendices, if applicable.

The On-Site Review Committee will evaluate the acceptability of the QEP based primarily on the following indicators:

1. **Focus.** The institution identifies a significant issue(s) related to student learning and justifies its use for the Quality Enhancement Plan.
2. **Institutional Capability for the Initiation and Continuation of the Plan.** The institution provides evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the Quality Enhancement Plan.
3. **Assessment of the Plan.** The institution demonstrates that it has the means for determining the success of its Quality Enhancement Plan.
4. **Broad-Based Involvement of the Community.** The institution demonstrates that all aspects of its community were involved in the development of the Plan.

Listed below are some questions that a committee member might use when evaluating an institution's QEP against the indicators above. The questions are *guidelines only—not a check list—and only are meant to be of assistance.*

1. **Focus of the Plan.** (1) *Has the institution provided a clear and concise description of the critical issue(s) to be addressed?* (2) *Has the institution described the relationship between the focus of the plan and student learning?* (3) *Has the institution provided relevant and appropriate goals and objectives to improve student learning?* (4) *Has the institution provided a comprehensive and clear analysis of the crucial importance of the Plan for improving the learning environment?* (5) *Has the institution identified the benefits to be derived from the QEP?*
2. **Institutional Capability for the Initiation and Continuation of the Plan.** (1) *Has the institution provided a time line for implementing and completing the QEP?* (2) *Has the institution assigned qualified*

individuals to administer and oversee its implementation? (3) Has the institution provided evidence of sufficient financial and physical resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP? (4) Has the institution allocated sufficient academic resources and systems to implement and sustain the outcomes of the Plan? (5) Has the institution established appropriate administrative processes for maintaining the progress of its quality improvements?

3. **Assessment of the Plan.** *(1) Has the institution developed means for assessing the success of its QEP? (2) Has the institution identified relevant internal and external measures to evaluate the Plan? (3) Has the institution identified an internal system for evaluating the QEP and monitoring its progress? (4) Has the institution described how the results of the evaluation of the QEP will be used to improve student learning?*
4. **Broad Based Involvement of the Community.** *(1) Has the institution described the methods used for the development of the QEP? (2) Has the institution demonstrated that all aspects of its community—faculty, staff, students, board members, and administrators—were involved in the development of the QEP?*

Writing the Reaffirmation Report

At the conclusion of the on-site review, the committee will write a report to submit to the Commission on Colleges. This report will indicate the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements with which it finds the institution to be in compliance and those with which it judges the institution to be in non-compliance.

For each Core Requirement and Comprehensive Standard with which it concludes that the institution is not in compliance, the committee will compose a recommendation(s) with supporting narrative that will guide the institution in developing its response to the recommendation. The institution will be required to respond to all recommendations in a report.

If the committee judges the QEP to be unacceptable and therefore not in compliance, it will write a recommendation as applies to Core Requirement 2.12. (See Appendix I for guidelines.)