Part V. QEP Impact Report

Section I. Title and Brief Description of the Quality Enhancement Plan

Intent

The University of Alabama (UA) chose to focus on active and collaborative learning experiences in 2005-06 as the underlying theme for its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). There was evidence from a variety of sources suggesting that upper division students at UA were actively engaged in their learning and were often working collaboratively on assignments and projects with their classmates. However, there were comparable findings suggesting that the levels of active and collaborative activity fell short in freshman and sophomore-level classes, particularly large enrollment classes. UA chose to concentrate on facilitating student learning by increasing the frequency of active and collaborative activities and adopted as its formal QEP title *Enhancing Active and Collaborative Learning in First Year Classes*.

Implementation

The first and second year of the five-year Quality Enhancement Plan emphasized a course-redesign approach where cohort groups of faculty redesigned their courses to enhance student learning outcomes by introducing or increasing active and collaborative learning activities. Considerable attention was also devoted to identifying measurable student learning outcomes in the QEP-designated course and the use of direct and indirect assessment measures to monitor accomplishment of the stated outcomes.

During the third and fourth year of the QEP, the initiative was expanded to involve more faculty and a broader array of academic disciplines in the institutional improvement initiative. The plan was also adjusted to permit redesigned courses at the upper-division level as well as courses of moderate-size enrollments. These adjustments raised awareness that many faculty interested in participating were not well-versed in collaborative learning techniques and were often challenged to identify empirically sound assessment measures to monitor the impact of active and collaborative activities on student learning outcomes in their classes.

The fifth year of the QEP continued the emphasis on broadening faculty participation across the UA academic community in advancing active and collaborative activities in their classes, but a new focus was added to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the efforts. QEP faculty were encouraged to develop and use rubrics as a course embedded assessment tool to assess student learning outcomes resulting from the initiation of active and collaborative classroom activities.

Impact

Faculty participation in the implementation of the QEP grew from a small cohort of 4-6 faculty during the first two years to 116 participating faculty in the fifth year. Evidence supported the conclusion that active and collaborative experiences increased over this five year span and student learning was correspondingly enhanced. The impact of the quality initiative culminated in a 2011 special issue of the *Journal of General Education* devoted exclusively to UA's QEP including examples of course-embedded active and collaborative learning activities and their impact on student learning.
Section II. A Succinct List of Initial Goals and Intended Outcomes for the QEP

In the original design of the Quality Enhancement Plan, there were seven key actions or change initiatives to affect active and collaborative learning activities in first year classes ranging from the establishment of an active and collaborative mini-grant program to the sponsorship of seminars and workshops to identify best practices in active and collaborative learning techniques. These action steps or tactical initiatives were devised to achieve three principal and overarching goals, namely:

1. Substantially increase the opportunities for student engagement in active and collaborative learning, especially in first year (lower division) courses;

2. Realize improved achievement of student learning outcomes as a function of increased engagement in active and collaborative learning; and

3. Improve student perceptions of their gains in knowledge, skills and personal development as a function of increased engagement in active and collaborative learning.

These three goals are inherently descriptive of the intended outcomes of the QEP and will serve as the focal points for various assessment findings in Section IV.

Section III. Changes Made to the QEP and the Reasons for Them

Three of the originally planned tactical initiatives to expand active and collaborative learning in first year classes included (1) formation of a QEP Implementation Team who would coordinate and support course redesigns for incorporating active and collaborative learning opportunities into first-year courses, (2) creation of an Active and Collaborative Learning Grant Program to support faculty in course redesigns involving active and collaborative learning, and (3) sponsorship of faculty development workshops and seminars on active and collaborative learning.

During the first two years, the QEP implementation Team developed a Course Redesign Framework that provided guidance for faculty in (a) defining student learning outcomes for their QEP course, (b) defining their active and collaborative learning strategy, (c) defining the direct and indirect assessment measures they intended to employ, (d) their student learning outcomes evaluation design, and (e) the framework for presenting results and planned follow-up improvement actions. The first year of the QEP was viewed as the pilot implementation year where a cohort of four faculty sought and received grant support to redesign their courses in a manner consistent with a preliminary set of course-redesign guidelines. In the second year of the QEP, there was a cohort of 6 participating faculty who redesigned their courses in a manner consistent with the finalized course redesign framework.

In 2007, with the resignation of the QEP Implementation Team Chair and a shift in administrative responsibilities of several key QEP Implementation Team members, the Provost decided to fill those QEP leadership voids with the appointment of a full-time, dedicated senior-level academic administrator, the Special Assistant to the Provost for Assessment, whose duties included providing leadership for all three of these initiatives, while also assuming the role of QEP coordinator and SACS liaison.
In Year Three (2007-08) the new QEP Coordinator recommended that the Active and Collaborative Learning Grant Guidelines be expanded to permit a larger number of faculty to participate in the process of infusing active and collaborative learning experiences in their courses. The changes in funding procedures and criteria increased participation from 6 faculty in Year Two to 25 faculty in Year Three, 71 faculty in Year Four and 116 faculty in Year Five. To accommodate this heightened level of participation the amounts of the grant awards were reduced from $5000 to $500-$1000.

Two other significant changes were introduced in Year Three that impacted the goals and intended QEP outcomes: the yoking of the Faculty Common Book Experience to the QEP and the establishment of an annual Active and Collaborative Learning Conference.

Faculty Common Book Experience

It is not uncommon for universities to require incoming freshmen to read a designated book to be subsequently discussed during freshman seminar classes. Less common are examples of common book experiences among faculty at colleges and universities. The University of Alabama began an annual common book experience for faculty in 2006. Over 225 faculty were given a copy of a selected book, and then the author(s) were invited to campus for a day-long discussion of the important points and issues addressed in the book. In Year Three of the QEP, the responsibility for coordinating this Faculty Common Book Experience was shifted to the Special Assistant to the Provost for Assessment, and it came to be aligned with the QEP implementation. The common book selected for the 2007-08 academic year was Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty by Elizabeth Barkley, K. Patricia Cross and Claire Howell Major. This was a perfect book to introduce faculty to best practices in advancing active and collaborative learning experiences in their classes, and it served to spark the broader faculty interest in the QEP that occurred during this QEP Year Three.

The Faculty Common Book Experience in QEP Year Four was Dannelle Stevens and Antonia Levi’s Introduction to Rubrics. It too was the right book at the right time. Faculty who had participated in the Active and Collaborative grant program the previous year and/or those who had an interest in submitting a grant proposal for the current year were anxious to learn more about the do's and don'ts of constructing rubrics to assess student performance. This same year (2008-09) much attention at UA was also being given to stepping up the use direct assessment measures in assessing the extent to which student learning outcomes were being achieved in our degree programs. The number of books distributed to faculty increased from 225 to over 450 in QEP Year Four.

The Faculty Common Book Experience in QEP Year Five was Developing Outcomes-based Assessment for Learner-centered Education: A Faculty Introduction by Amy Driscoll and Swarup Wood. The assessment emphasis within degree programs this 2009-10 academic year was focused on course-embedded assessment approaches. This was the standard procedure within QEP funded courses but was coming to be the campus standard for monitoring achievement of student learning outcomes. The distribution for this book increased to over 950 UA faculty.

Active and Collaborative Learning Conference

In QEP Year Three through Year Five, the authors of the Faculty Common Book Experience were invited to UA to discuss the central topics and issues in their books. In QEP Year Three it was decided to incorporate this one-day visit by the authors into a day-long Active and Collaborative Learning Conference during which the authors would serve as keynote speakers or workshop facilitators. An Active and Collaborative Learning Conference Agenda often included an opening presentation by the authors followed by concurrent sessions related to the theme of the common book. It was common to have from 100 to 150 faculty attending one or more of the sessions conducted during these conferences. In some of the sessions, UA faculty initiatives designed to advance active and collaborative experiences were showcased.
Other Tactical Initiatives To Expand Active & Collaborative Learning

There were two other initiatives identified in the QEP that were designed to expand active and collaborative learning experiences:

- a special session on active and collaborative learning techniques was included in UA's Graduate School's annual two-day Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) Workshop that occurs prior to the start of the fall semester.

- a new website was created where QEP faculty posted the rubrics they used in their courses during the Spring 2009 semester to assess performance on active and collaborative assignments and activities.

It has been difficult to assess the impact of these initiatives although anecdotal evidence and survey findings would suggest that the information was perceived favorably.

There were two action steps or tactical initiatives presented in the QEP that did not materialize. The "Scholarship of Teaching Team" was not continued after QEP Year Two. Its intended role, to serve as a "bottom-up" vehicle to prompt innovations in teaching effectiveness, is still recognized at UA as an important stimulus to advance best practices in undergraduate education, but remains as an action step to be advanced. Aligned to this initiative is the proposed QEP action step to study faculty perceptions of teaching innovations and the level of faculty interest in participating in enrichment experiences addressing pedagogy as well as technology infusion in their courses. Some efforts have been made at the department and college level exploring this interest, but it has not been driven by the QEP.

Section IV. Achievement of QEP Goals and Impact on Student Learning

There is both direct and indirect evidence supporting the accomplishment of each of the three QEP Goals and the ultimate impact on student learning.

Goal 1. Substantially increase the opportunities for student engagement in active and collaborative learning, especially in first year (lower division) courses.

There are two primary sources of evidence leading one to conclude that opportunities for student engagement in active and collaborative learning have been increased at UA over the past five years of UA's Quality Enhancement Plan:

a. more UA faculty introduced active and collaborative learning activities as a result of QEP-funded courses each of the five years (see Figure 1), and

b. student responses on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) affirm that the frequency of active and collaborative learning experiences increased over the five year period of the QEP (see Figure 2).
In Year One, there were four faculty who participated in the QEP pilot administration. In Year Two, there were six faculty who participated in the first official QEP cohort utilizing the Course Redesign Framework. By year Five there were 126 faculty members who received Active and Collaborative Learning Grants to incorporate active or collaborative learning experiences in their courses. These totals only represent a small portion of the total number of UA faculty teaching undergraduate courses each year but do affirm there were increasing numbers of active and collaborative experiences occurring during this five year QEP period.

The UA 2005 through 2010 NSSE results also suggest a pattern of increasing levels of active and collaborative learning activities. There are 7 items on the NSSE that make up the Active and Collaborative Learning NSSE Benchmark. These items ask the student how frequently they

- Ask questions in class or participate in class discussions
- Make a class presentation
- Work with other students on projects during class
- Work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutor or teach other students
- Participate in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- Discuss ideas from class readings with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

The Active and Collaborative Benchmark Scores for First Year Students across the five years of the QEP are presented in Figure 2.
Figure 2
NSSE Active & Collaborative Learning Benchmark Values During QEP

*Note: In 2009, UA did not participate in the national administration of NSSE. Instead, the NSSE was administered locally to targeted groups of UA students.

One of the seven NSSE items within the Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmark is particularly relevant to the UA QEP Goal 1. Item 1.h asks the student how frequently they "work with other students on projects during class." Since QEP Goal 1 emphasizes substantially increasing opportunities for student engagement in active and collaborative learning, this single item may be a stronger indication of goal attainment than the overall benchmark value. The percentage of first year students who responded "often" or "very often" to this item across the five years of the QEP is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Percent of Students Reporting "Often" or "Very Often" to the NSSE Item
Work with other students on projects during class

Taken together these results lead one to conclude that opportunities for student engagement in active and collaboratively learning were substantially increased during the five year QEP period.

Goal 2 Realize improved achievement of student learning outcomes as a function of increased engagement in active and collaborative learning.
It was recognized during the development of the QEP that it would not be possible to draw empirically sound conclusions concerning overall student learning within first year classes that could be directly attributed to increases in active and collaborative learning experiences. There were too many confounding variables that impact student performance to be able to readily tease out how much of the performance variation could be attributed to active and collaborative learning experiences. While a macro-level analysis of increases in active and collaborative learning would be possible, a micro-analysis of student learning would be the more appropriate approach to demonstrating the impact of active and collaborative course experiences.

A representative sample of evidence demonstrating the achievement of student learning outcomes in QEP courses is presented below. Summaries of student learning outcomes are presented from the first official QEP cohort in 2007 and the last cohort in 2010.

2007 QEP Cohort (all six faculty participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Results Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sciences</td>
<td>Dr. Martha Powell</td>
<td>Compared to traditional presentations of this course, students in the “Studio” section reported significantly higher contributions to their analytical skills, communication skill, research skills and teamwork.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSC 108, Intro Biology for Non-Majors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Department: History</td>
<td>Dr. Lisa Door</td>
<td>When compared to Dr. Door’s previous term’s HY 204, the QEP section was more likely to think the class improved ability to utilize in integrate multiple kinds of sources and media as a team either somewhat or very much (78% QEP vs. 66%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HY 204, American Civilization Since 1865</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Dr. Stanley Jones</td>
<td>Pre and post test performance on the Force Concept Inventory (tests students understanding of basic physics concepts) show a gain in the 20-30% range; viewed as not satisfactory improvement as a result of collaborative classroom efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: Anthropology</td>
<td>Dr. Lisa LeCount</td>
<td>Compared mean scores for aligned exam questions between 2007QEP course and 2005 non-QEP course. Very slight but positive improvement with collaborative 2007 QEP course experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN 103, Great Discoveries in Archaeology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising &amp; Public Relations</td>
<td>Dr. Caryl Cooper</td>
<td>Aligned course embedded assessment measures with course outcomes and measured success levels on tests and exams; Established baseline levels on an Active &amp; Collaborative Learning Survey with plan to eventually correlate survey outcomes with student success measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC 101, Introduction to Mass Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Mr. Sam Evers</td>
<td>Employed course embedded assessment approaches to measure overall student success within a self-paced, computer based learning environment. Course times flexible for students. Results yield &gt; 80% correct responses on aligned questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math 100, Intermediate Algebra</td>
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### 2010 QEP Cohort (a sample of 6 of 116 faculty participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Results Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department: English&lt;br&gt;EN 422, Adv Studies in American Literature</td>
<td>Dr. Patti White</td>
<td>Students divided into four groups and tasked with devising an event or exercise that manifested one of the four principles of chaos theory. Each group effectively demonstrated the scientific principle, overcame obstacles in planning and execution and generated enthusiasm and interest among the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: Clothing, Textiles and Interior Design&lt;br&gt;CTD 425 Historic Documentation / Adv Residential Design</td>
<td>Dr. Michelle Lee</td>
<td>Teams of 4 students chose a research topic to present to a class in multi-media format. A rubric was used to evaluate both individual and group performance. All teams scored &gt;75% using the rubric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: History&lt;br&gt;HY 105 Western Civilization to 1648</td>
<td>Dr. David Michelson</td>
<td>Teams of 3-4 students led a discussion for 5 minutes at the beginning of class. Teams were assessed by a rubric and the use of 2 online surveys. All 23 students met student learning outcome expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: Kinesiology&lt;br&gt;KIN 305, Analysis of Teaching Movement II &amp; IV</td>
<td>Dr. Elizabeth Woodruff</td>
<td>Assessment was based on the 5 elements of choreography (originality, transitions, expressing ideas, etc.). Panel of judges determined that all 3 groups reached level 3 in originality. Groups varied in transitions between level 2 (planned/sometimes forgets) and Level 3 (smooth/fluent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: Music Education&lt;br&gt;MUS 447, Choir Handbook</td>
<td>Dr. Marvin Latimer</td>
<td>Assignment = group produced choir handbook as a usable website in iWeb. Websites assessed using a rubric. The website included a title page, philosophical statement, brief description of choirs, an assessment &amp; grading procedure. One project score receive a perfect score of 28.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: Modern Languages &amp; Classics&lt;br&gt;SP 390, Masterpieces of US Latina/o Literature</td>
<td>Dr. Ignacio Rodeno</td>
<td>The student discussed in groups analysis of how assigned text related to the socio-historical and literary context. Students answered guided questions in groups of four. Formal assessment of this task on exam 1 had average of 83%, in exam 2 an avg of 87% and in exam 3 an avg of 89%. Students rated their class participation an 89% at mid semester and 93% at the end.</td>
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**Goal 3 Improve student perceptions of their gains in knowledge, skills and personal development as a function of increased engagement in active and collaborative learning.**

In addition to being asked on the NSSE how frequently they were actively involved in their course experiences (i.e., asked questions, participated in class discussions, made class presentations) or how frequently they worked collaboratively with other students on assignments and activities (both inside and outside of class), students completing the NSSE were also asked to what extent the experiences they had during the academic year contributed to their knowledge, skills, personal development. It was an important correlate in the overall QEP for students to grow in their ability to work with others, to be called on more frequently during the QEP period to think critically and analytically, and/or to have more classroom experiences calling on them to analyze and problem solve.

In Figure 4 below, comparisons are made between pre-QEP levels and five year average post QEP levels of gains in knowledge, skills and abilities. Students were asked "To what extent have your experiences this year contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development in the following areas".
Section V. Unanticipated Outcomes of the QEP

By the beginning of Year Three of the QEP the Dean, Associate Deans and Department Chairs within UA’s College of Arts and Sciences had embraced the Course Redesign Framework as a model to be employed in the design of not only all new course offerings within the college but the reshaping of existing courses. Student learning outcomes became a required element in every course syllabus. A QEP matrix is now in place that includes learning outcomes, direct and indirect assessment, results, and suggestions for improvements. In the last three years, almost 2/3 of the participating faculty have completed a full matrix of their courses. Also included in the matrix are active and collaborative activities and any assessments of them. The learner-centered model of instructional effectiveness has become the norm for all 22 academic departments within the college.

An extraordinary target of opportunity emerged during Year Four of the QEP. One of UA's distinguished faculty, Dr. Claire Major, who serves as an editor for the Journal of General Education, suggested that a special issue of the journal might be devoted to the Active and Collaborative QEP initiatives underway at UA. This Special Issue of the Journal of General Education includes reports from six of the 2009 QEP Active & Collaborative Grants and a lead article written by UA's Executive Vice President and Provost, Dr. Judy Bonner. This special issue is scheduled to appear as Volume 59, No 4 later this year.

Section VI. Continuing the QEP

The QEP has sparked an even greater enthusiasm on The University of Alabama campus to embrace the learner-centered model of instructional effectiveness that shifts the culture from one focusing on teaching to one focusing on student learning. We intend to continue to support faculty initiatives to increase active and collaborative activities in their classes and will likely expand this effort to courses offered within our graduate programs. It appears reasonable to suggest that within the very near future every course offered at UA will include assignments calling on students to actively engage their subject matter. This emphasis has also heightened our recognition of the importance of advancing innovative and empirically-sound student learning outcomes assessment measures, so it is our intent to continue to organize and present conferences and workshops designed to familiarize faculty with the newest and most effective ways of assessing and evaluating student achievement.