

The QEP Curriculum Subcommittee Report

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Committee Charge

- Review the student learning outcomes for the cornerstone course
- Review appropriateness of curriculum for the cornerstone students
- Review the assignments of the curriculum and how they align with the student learning outcomes (Passport, Critical thinking Journal, Final Essay Assignment and Final Small Group Project)
- Review course assessments and how they align with the student learning outcomes
- Review and assess the number of feasible assignments and assessments for this course

Actions Taken by Committee

Committee members met for three one hour sessions to address the following:

- Review the pilot Cornerstone Course incorporating SACS recommendations
- Make revisions and suggestions for the survey to be sent out to faculty teaching a pilot section of the Cornerstone course
- Review and discuss survey results
- Review report summary and recommendations for the Cornerstone Course Curriculum

For additional information regarding the meeting dates, discussions at each meeting and for a roster of committee members in attendance, refer to the minutes for each meeting.

QEP Subcommittee Summary of Survey Findings

*The summary of survey findings below are based upon thirteen out of fourteen possible respondents. Respondents are faculty that were certified to teach the first year experience course by completing the appropriate modules through the college's Teaching and Learning Center and who piloted the Cornerstone Experience in the spring semester 2012. In the survey faculty was asked to respond to eight areas: **Alignment of Assignments and Assessments and Student Learning Outcomes, Textbook and Instructional Resource Materials, Quantity and Quality/Value of Common Course Assignments, Common Grading Scale, Cornerstone Word Association, Curriculum Overview, Perceived Value of Using Peer Architects in the Future and Future Cornerstone Involvement.***

Alignment of Assignments and Assessments and Student Learning Outcomes

Faculty teaching the cornerstone course was asked to rate how well the required assignments (Critical Thinking Journal, Passport, Final Essay and Final Group Presentation) and assessments aligned with the student learning outcomes for the course. Three of the required assignments received ratings over four points out of a five point scale. The Final Group Presentation received the highest alignment rating with roughly 77% (10 respondents) of the respondents selecting either extremely well aligned or well aligned with an average score of 4.23. The Critical Thinking Journal Assignment was a close second, also with 77% (10 respondents) of the respondents selecting either extremely well aligned or well aligned with an average score slightly lower at 4.15. The next assignment that received the highest number of points for being aligned was the Critical Thinking Journal. Roughly 46% (6 respondents) of the respondents selected extremely well aligned or well aligned; another 23% (3 respondents) felt that it was moderately aligned with an average rating of 4.15. The Passport Assignment received the lowest alignment rating. Roughly 46% (6 respondents) of the respondents thought that the assignment was extremely well aligned or well aligned; another 30% (4 respondents) thought that it was moderately aligned; and 23% (3 respondents) thought that it was slightly aligned with an overall rating score falling under 4 points at 3.46. While respondents generally agreed that the required assignments were aligned, more concern was expressed when reviewing the student learning outcomes for the course. Fifty percent of the respondents believe that some revisions should be made to the student learning outcomes. One additional person alluded to concerns without suggesting specific revisions by saying that "achieving all of them is difficult". Additional comments suggest that we review the student learning outcomes for the Cornerstone course and reduce the number of student learning outcomes by eliminating those outcomes that appear to overlap with others. Another suggestion to reduce the number of student learning outcomes was to have one student learning outcome for the

“four corners” of the course. Three respondents did express however that they do NOT believe that any changes needed to be made to the student learning outcomes for the Cornerstone course. Upon reviewing the two common assignment rubrics for the Critical Thinking Journal assignment and the Final Group Presentation assignment for alignment with the student learning outcomes, the majority of respondents seem to agree that the rubrics were in alignment. Sixty-two percent (8 respondents) felt that the Critical Thinking Journal assignment was either extremely well aligned or well aligned with the student learning outcomes; while thirty percent (4 respondents) felt that it was moderately aligned and only 7.7% (1 person) responded that it was slightly aligned. Sixty-seven percent (8 respondents) felt that the Final Group Presentation assignment was either extremely well aligned or well aligned with the student learning outcomes; while three respondents felt that it was only moderately aligned. Finally in this section, respondents were asked to evaluate how resourceful they found the SMARTERMEASURE and the Type Focus assessments to be in supporting instruction in the course. SMARTERMEASURE is an assessment that measures readiness for learning in a technology rich environment. It is not intended to make an absolute decision as to whether or not students will succeed in college. It provides knowledge regarding strengths in reading recall, technology competence, technology knowledge, personal attributes and Life factors. The Life factors section of SMARTERMEASURE measures five items: time, place, resources, and skills. The personal attributes section measures six items: time management, procrastination, persistence, academic attributes, locus of control and willingness to ask for help. TypeFocus assesses personality type to help people select suitable career choices that will match their values and interests. Eight respondents found both assessments to be moderate to extremely resourceful in the course. Two respondents reported that SMARTERMEASURE was not resourceful at all and two respondents found TypeFocus to be only slightly resourceful.

Textbook and Instructional Resource Materials

The textbook was identified as being the most valuable resource for Cornerstone faculty of the required instructional materials (Cornerstone textbook, critical thinking booklet, and passport) receiving a 3.69 out of 5 points. The critical thinking booklet received the second highest score at only 2.50 points and the passport received the lowest points at 2.31. Roughly sixty-two percent of the respondents said that there were instructional materials that were required and not used at all or not used sufficiently to justify the cost for students. Nearly half felt that the Passport was not resourceful at all and about one-third of the respondents felt that the critical thinking booklet was not resourceful at all.

Quantity and Quality/Value of Common Course Assignments

Roughly seventy percent (9 respondents) felt that the number of course assignments were either extremely or very manageable. Two respondents thought that the assignments were

somewhat manageable and only one person thought that the assignments were not manageable at all. Approximately sixty-two percent of the respondents felt that the number of out-of-class assignments was just right, however thirty percent (4 respondents) felt there were slightly too many out of class assignments and only one person thought that the number of out of class assignments was overwhelming.

Common Grading Scale

Most of the faculty piloting the Cornerstone course was satisfied with the common grading scale. Eight of the respondents were very satisfied with the grading scale and one was extremely satisfied. Four were moderately satisfied. No responses were reported for not satisfied or extremely dissatisfied. Eight respondents included additional comments. Four of the eight responses included additional support for not making changes to the grading scale. Additional comments for changing the common grading scale included increasing the percentage value of the Final Group Presentation assignment from .15 to .20, increasing the percentage of points that an instructor may assign from .20 to .30, establishing a higher percentage of points for basic skills such as attendance, participation, and timely submission of assignments; too much emphasis on critical thinking journal, and reduce the percentage points for the Final Group Presentation assignment.

Cornerstone Word Association

Respondents were asked to rate the extent they would use the words Intellectually engaging, Informative, Intellectually rigorous, Fun and Exciting to describe the **current** curriculum of the Cornerstone course and to what extent those same words **should** be used to describe the curriculum for the Cornerstone course. They were asked to rate the words using the following scale: 5 points-Definitely, 4 points-Probably, 3 points-Maybe, 2 points-Somewhat, 1 point- Not At All. The top word that was chosen by 100% of the respondents to describe the **current** curriculum was informative. Roughly seventy percent (9 respondents) felt that the word definitely described the curriculum followed by thirty percent of the respondents (4 respondents) who felt that the word probably described the curriculum for a score of 4.69 out of 5. The word receiving the second highest rating to describe the current curriculum was intellectually engaging; eight respondents said that this word either definitely or probably described the current curriculum for an overall score of 3.77. The word that received the third highest rating to describe the current curriculum was intellectually rigorous; seven respondents said that the word either definitely or probably described the current curriculum for an overall score of 3.46. The words fun and exciting were chosen fourth and fifth respectively to describe the current curriculum of the Cornerstone course. An additional comment from a respondent suggested that the extent to which these words could be used to describe the current curriculum depends upon the teacher and the student mix.

When applying these same words to how the Cornerstone curriculum *should* be described, there were some similarities as well as notable contrasts. The words informative and intellectually engaging were once again selected respectively as first and second choices as the top words that should be used to describe the Cornerstone curriculum. All thirteen respondents felt that the course should definitely be informative compared to the 9 respondents who chose definitely for the word informative to describe the current curriculum. Ten respondents felt that the course should definitely be intellectually engaging compared to the 5 respondents who thought that the current curriculum was definitely engaging. However the word selected by seventy-seven percent of the respondents to receive the third highest rating as a word that should be used to define the Cornerstone curriculum was fun compared to the words intellectually rigorous identified by respondents as the word with the third highest rating for describing the current Cornerstone curriculum. Intellectually rigorous received the lowest rating by respondents as one of the five words that should be used to describe the curriculum.

Curriculum Overview

Respondents were asked three open ended questions to gather ideas regarding the challenges, strengths and ways to improve the Cornerstone curriculum. Motivating and engaging students emerged as central themes when respondents addressed the challenges implementing the Cornerstone curriculum. Motivating students to participate in activities inside and outside of the classroom, to engage in the classroom, to attend class regularly, to complete and submit assignments on time; to behave appropriately and responsibly, and to become interested in the course content were specific challenges reflected in respondents' comments. Secondary themes dealt with too many assignments and insufficient time to cover all the course material. A third theme related to lack of experience teaching this course and/or teaching developmental students.

The curriculum emerged as a primary theme to describe the strengths of the course. One respondent described the curriculum as organized, clear and informative. Additional comments highlighted the focus on self-awareness, self-reflection, the critical thinking journal, and the variety of assignments as additional strengths of the Cornerstone curriculum. Establishing meaningful relationships also emerged as a theme regarding the curriculum strengths. Specific comments addressed the development of the faculty/student relationship, the positive relationships developed between co-workers in academic divisions and student services; and assisting students to initiate important relationships to support their continued success at Edison State College by introducing them to individuals in other support services such as the library, financial aid, student services, and advising.

A primary theme that emerged for improving the curriculum was critical thinking. Six responses out of a total of thirteen mentioned critical thinking specifically, although other comments could be construed as referring to critical thinking. Comments mentioning critical thinking specifically include: making it a more prominent part of the activities in the course, two suggestions to use a simplified version of the Elder-Paul model focused on some of the elements, standards and/or intellectual traits instead of the complete critical thinking model, two suggestions that we reexamine our use of the CCTST critical thinking test either by making a decision to not use it or by providing effective teaching materials so that our students will perform better on the pre and post critical thinking tests, and one suggestion that we use a critical thinking focus for better prepared students and a success strategies focus for underprepared students. Other ideas for improving the curriculum appear to be in alignment with some of the earlier responses from faculty piloting the course. For example, suggestions for improving the curriculum continue to suggest that we focus the curriculum by either reducing the number of student learning outcomes, reducing the number of assignments, eliminating the breadth and depth of the assignments or by deleting some of the topics covered. The Passport assignment is another recurring topic for future curriculum development. Finally, other ways in which respondents would improve the curriculum seem to be related to teaching a course for the first time and not having the time to develop activities to make it their own rather than a flaw in the current curriculum. For example, some ideas for improvement included making assignments more student-centered and relevant; and using current events to illustrate concepts. There is nothing in the current curriculum that would prohibit one from incorporating these teaching strategies to improve student learning.

Perceived Value of Using Peer Architects in the Future

The use of peer architects (student mentors) in the Cornerstone course is part of the original QEP proposal and is a best practice for first year experience courses. Time restraints did not allow for hiring and training peer architects for the Cornerstone pilot. Plans are already in process to implement this phase of the QEP during fall semester 2012. Since faculty was originally told that they would be assigned a peer architect we wanted to know after teaching the course for one semester, if they could see a benefit in having a peer architect in future Cornerstone classes and how they might utilize them. Five respondents expressed uncertainty in answering this question because they were either not sure of the responsibilities of the peer mentor or because they did not have one this semester. However 46% (6 respondents) thought that the use of peer architects could be extremely helpful or very helpful in the future; 39% (5 respondents) thought that they would be moderately helpful; 15% (2 respondents) thought that the peer architects would be somewhat helpful and no respondent thought that the peer architects would not be helpful at all. Two respondents expressed some concern about the amount of time needed to establish a working relationship with the peer architects. The ideas

for the responsibilities for peer architects were centered on motivating and engaging students inside and outside of the classroom. Specific ideas for the roles and responsibilities of peer architects include assisting with group work, connecting students with campus activities and encouraging them to attend events, activities, and join clubs; helping students who are struggling with critical thinking journal reflections, clarifying assignments, and staying in touch with students who are not engaged or not attending classes regularly.

Future Cornerstone Involvement

Faculty who piloted the Cornerstone course was asked to reflect upon their future involvement with the Cornerstone course and how often they would like to teach the course. All thirteen respondents planned to be involved with the Cornerstone course either as a teacher and/or to be involved in training others to teach the Cornerstone Experience. Three would like to teach this course as often as their Dean would grant approval; four would like to teach this course once a semester including summers; one would like to teach once a semester excluding summers; and four would like to teach this course once a year. Only one respondent indicated that they do not plan to teach the course again.

Summary of Subcommittee Recommendations for Cornerstone Curriculum

- Review the current use of the Elder-Paul Critical Thinking Model in the course to determine a simplified version more appropriate for first year experience students
- Continue to address focusing the scope of the course by
 - Reviewing the student learning outcomes
 - Reviewing the number of success strategies highlighted in the course
 - Reducing the number of critical thinking journal entries
- Review the appropriateness of the CCTST for the critical thinking pre and posttest for students
- Review the Passport assignment and revise to meet the requirements for engagement on all campuses
- Review whether the current passport booklet and the critical thinking booklet should be packaged with the textbook
- Obtain additional information about the possible strengths and weaknesses regarding the current textbook
- Work with the Professional Development committee to make sure that all Cornerstone Experience Faculty are properly trained on course assignments and assessments; such as the CCTST (Critical thinking test), SMARTERMEASURE, TypeFocus and ways to motivate students and teach developmental students.

- Plan and facilitate a focus group with faculty answering the survey to elaborate and flesh out other concerns that may not be clear from survey results.