Lone Star College System
Quality Enhancement Plan

Best Start

The LSCS First-Year Experience

SACS-COC On-site Visit: 4 – 6 Oct 2011

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Executive Summary

The Lone Star College System (LSCS) Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), entitled “Best Start,” will enhance the learning environment for first-time-in-college (FTIC) students by helping them address two key issues that influence their sustained success in college: 1) clarifying an academic goal, and 2) addressing an identified barrier to achieving the goal.

The theme for the QEP is “First-Year Experience” (FYE), a concept that describes the academic, intellectual, social and emotional development of students during the first year of college. Research suggests that the experiences of the first year of college have a strong impact upon student success (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004). The underlying idea is that improving the first-year experience will lead more students to acculturate better, be more engaged with the campus, complete their classes, and ultimately realize their educational goals.

To narrow the focus within the broader theme of first-year experience, members of the QEP Development Committee conducted campus focus groups and a college-wide student success workshop, reviewed learning outcomes from LSCS programs associated with FYE, and convened meetings with numerous committees. Insights from those activities revealed two principles about the first-year experience that guided the development of the QEP:

• Specific student needs emerged as key FYE focus areas for the QEP:
  o establishing a personal connection to the college;
  o developing an educational plan;
  o recognizing and addressing challenges to success.
• Scalable strategies should be incorporated to engage more first-year students.

From the prior Achieving the Dream (AtD) initiative, LSCS learned that students “don’t do optional.” Although a low percentage of students participated in the voluntary out-of-class AtD initiatives, the data show a positive impact on student success and retention.

The LSCS experience is not unique. A recent study (Capps, 2010) showed that adult college students, nation-wide, are spending less time than ever before on out-of-class college-related activities, and initiatives that depend on out-of-class optional activities have not been successful with today’s students. Thus, to affect fundamental change, LSCS will focus on the learning environment in the classroom.

**QEP Strategy: Adjust the Learning Environment**

The strategy for the QEP involves adjusting the learning environment to provide the “best start” for first-time-in-college students by removing the “optional” concept through two scalable and enhanced classroom assignments supporting two learning outcomes that will lead to increased student success and retention.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

With assistance from faculty, advisors, mentors, and other support services:

1. students will clarify an educational goal and learning plan; and
2. students will identify and address a barrier to success.
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I. Broad-based Institutional Process Identifying Key Issues

The Lone Star College System is a multi-campus community college system in the northern and northwestern sections of the Houston metropolitan area. The college system is the second largest college system in Texas and the largest system in the Houston area. With five campuses, two university centers, and six satellite centers, the college system serves eleven partner school districts and a population of over 1.9 million people across a geographic area comprising 1400 square miles in Harris and Montgomery counties. Student enrollment is over 70,000 in credit classes and 15,000 in continuing education.

The broad-based planning process for an institution of this size and complexity involved multiple steps and strategies. This chapter discusses the institutional planning process that culminated in determining the issues of focus for the Quality Enhancement Plan. Included below are details of the various organizational planning activities employed to collect insights and input for the QEP. The following major steps for the planning process are discussed below:

- QEP Theme Selection
- Lone Star College Context for QEP Focus
- QEP Focus: Best Start
- Learning Environment and Learning Outcomes Formation
- Framework Development
- Implementation and Timeline

A QEP Development Committee was established to oversee the planning process, with its members appointed by the college Presidents. At key times along the multiple phases of the planning journey, the committee membership was modified to more appropriately support specific activities. The initial QEP Development Committee for 2009-2010 was formed with the following members and Chair:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phillips, Claire (Chair)</td>
<td>Faculty, Business (LSC-CyFair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botkin, Rose</td>
<td>Reference Librarian (LSC-CyFair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandes, Nathalie</td>
<td>Faculty, Geology (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryant, Lisa</td>
<td>Faculty, Speech (LSC-Kingwood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlisle, Jeanette (FA 2009)</td>
<td>Faculty, Accounting (LSC-North Harris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gant, Angela</td>
<td>Faculty, DS English (LSC-North Harris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hicks, April</td>
<td>Research Analyst (LSC-CyFair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kainer, Danny</td>
<td>Faculty, Biology (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malkan, Rajiv</td>
<td>Faculty, Computer (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray, Judy</td>
<td>VP of Instruction (LSC-Tomball)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osbourn, Peggy</td>
<td>Counseling Director (LSC-CyFair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puller, David</td>
<td>Reference Librarian (LSC-North Harris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornton, Susan (SP 2010)</td>
<td>Faculty, Business (LSC-North Harris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsoi, Gerry</td>
<td>Faculty, Computer (LSC-Tomball)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waters, Victoria</td>
<td>Extended Learning Ctr. Mgr. (LSC-Tomball)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Quality Enhancement Plan Development Committee’s first task was to gain a better understanding of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) concept and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) expectations. The chairperson of the QEP Development Committee and other LSCS representatives attended the Summer 2009 Institute on Quality Enhancement and Accreditation, the SACSCOC Annual Meeting in December 2009, and the Leadership Orientation Meeting in January 2010.

To help committee members stay on target, the committee frequently reviewed QEP information provided by the SACSCOC Commission on Colleges (2010b). According to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (2010a) Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation, an institution’s QEP should be:

“a carefully designed course of action that addresses a well-defined and focused topic related to enhancing student learning and is designed to positively affect overall institutional quality and effectiveness of educational programs.” (p. 35)

Additional information in the 2010 SACSCOC Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation describes the QEP as:

• Targeting long-term improvement of student learning and/or the learning environment;
• Being an initiative that does not currently exist in any significant way in the system;
• Arising from the institution’s ongoing institution-wide planning and evaluation process; linking to strategic academic planning;
• Having strong faculty involvement;
• Being broad-based to the extent that it can be positioned to affect multiple constituencies, locations and curriculum areas yet focused narrowly enough so as to be attainable within a five year implementation period (i.e. find a clearly defined niche that can be consistently applied system-wide);
• Being assessable and measureable; producing system-wide results; implies consistent implementation of strategies (multiple measure assessments must be built into the proposal with both formative and summative assessments), and
• Demonstrating institutional capability to implement the plan (i.e. sufficient resource allocation over and above normal program operations); and
• Being implemented after the onsite SACS-COC committee visit and plan approval.

A. QEP Theme Selection

During the 2009-2010 academic year, the QEP Development Committee sought input from community members, students, and LSCS employees. The committee solicited ideas in order to explore what LSCS does well and what gaps were perceived to exist.

Input from colleagues was received through a variety of means. QEP Development Committee members attended on-campus meetings to describe the QEP and gather feedback. Other committee members used their Facebook accounts to acquire information from LSCS colleagues while others set up computer kiosks at community events and at each of the college campus libraries. Lastly, an email was sent to all
college employees seeking their input via an online survey. More than 500 responses were received in this preliminary investigation.

Committee members also collected and synthesized college data reports. Data were reviewed from the recently completed 2009 college strategic planning process, results from LSCS’s 2009 cohort of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2009), the annual report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2009), regularly produced reports from the Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness (2011), reports generated for the Achieving the Dream (AtD) initiative, and other administrative meeting documents.

In December 2009, committee members compiled the above information and sorted ideas into categories or themes. The following emerged as the “top ten” potential themes for a Lone Star College System Quality Enhancement Plan (alphabetically listed):

- Academic Support
- Creating “The Right Place” for Students
- First-Year Experience
- Innovation in Communication
- Preparing Students for “the Real World”
- Project Graduation
- Student Engagement
- Student Resources
- Student Writing Skills
- Working in Higher Education in the 21st Century

In January 2010, the college community ranked by order the top 5 themes based on which have the greatest potential for enhancing student learning. Nearly 700 responses were received from this second online survey.

Based on this round of feedback, three general themes were identified for further exploration. These were:

- Services for Student Success (S3)
- First-Year Experience (FYE)
- Student Engagement (SE)

The three themes were studied and presented to the college system’s Executive Council (which includes the Chancellor, Vice Chancellors, and campus Presidents). During the summer of 2010, the Executive Council selected “First-Year Experience” as the theme for the QEP.

**Anticipated Impact from the QEP Focused on First-Year Experience**

The First-Year Experience movement tends to focus on student success fostered by a positive learning environment, proactive guidance, and intervention where warranted. We therefore anticipate a first-year experience focus for LSCS’s Quality Enhancement Plan will improve student success and also reveal opportunities to improve student support services, communication, collaboration, and on-campus attitude and culture.

The QEP theme is supportive of the college mission, several of the 2009-2011 strategic plan objectives, and multiple objectives from the recently adopted 2012-2015 strategic plan, as indicated below.
College Mission

“Lone Star College System provides comprehensive educational opportunities and programs to enrich lives” (Lone Star College System, 2011). Emphasizing the first-year experience directly supports the college mission, by focusing on the first year as the most important time for influencing whether students persist to complete their educational goals.

Strategic Plan 2009-2011

Through instruction, activities and support services that assist students to successfully begin their college careers, the QEP theme of first-year experience supports the following 2009-2011 Lone Star College System strategic goals (Lone Star College System Board of Trustees, 2009):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goals</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1: Maintain Affordability and Accessibility</td>
<td>• 1.3 Increase accessibility and opportunity to diverse populations in the region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 3: Provide academic excellence and strengthen connectivity and accountability though high quality academic and service programs</td>
<td>• 3.5 Enhance the infrastructure and visibility of extra-curricular and student organizations across the system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 4: Focus on outcome driven student success</td>
<td>• 4.1 Strengthen all academic support services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4.2 Focus on discipline-specific advising opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4.5 Develop a method to track student goal attainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4.6 Provide clear degree program course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 6: Provide quality student focused service</td>
<td>• 6.2 Strengthen and improve visibility of student and on-line support services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategic Plan 2012-2015

The QEP theme of first-year experience likewise supports the updated 2012-2015 Lone Star College System strategic goals (Lone Star College System Board of Trustees, 2011):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Initiative</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1: Increase completion and achievement of all students.</td>
<td>• 1.1 Strengthen all academic and student support services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1.3 Develop a method to track student goals and completion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• 1.4 Strengthen clarity of degree program course requirements.

Goal 2: Provide high quality academic instruction.

• 2.1 Maintain faculty driven academic review process of programs.
• 2.2 Make accountability and performance transparent to stakeholders.
• 2.3 Maintain high academic standards.
• 2.5 Develop faculty driven outcome assessment.

Goal 3: Provide quality student focused service.

• 3.2 Improve visibility of student and online support services.
• 3.4 Promote student engagement and connectivity.
• 3.5 Enhance quality and visibility of extra-curricular and student organizations across the system.

B. Lone Star College Context for QEP Focus

The first-year experience is a broad theme that can encompass every aspect of the student’s experience. Therefore, following the selection of the first-year experience as the theme for the QEP during the summer of 2010, work commenced in Fall 2010 to explore appropriate options for focus that potentially would build upon our system’s prior student success initiatives and be responsive to the local needs of our students. Membership for the QEP Development Committee was adjusted for this phase of the process to incorporate individuals who are associated with college areas typically identified with the first-year experience.

The first Chair of the QEP Development Committee assumed a new position within the college system in August 2010. Therefore, a new Chair for the committee was identified in September 2010.

The QEP Development Committee for Fall 2010 was formed with the following members and Chair:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carstens, Ryan (Chair)</td>
<td>Dean, Educational Services (LSC-Tomball)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adkins, Kathleen</td>
<td>Advising/Counseling (LSC-Kingwood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botkin, Rose</td>
<td>Reference Librarian (LSC-CyFair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandes, Nathalie</td>
<td>Faculty, Geology (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gant, Angela</td>
<td>Faculty, DS English (LSC-North Harris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Jadi</td>
<td>Community member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kainer, Danny</td>
<td>Faculty, Biology (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, Ted</td>
<td>Dean (LSC-CyFair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowe, Rachael</td>
<td>Counselor (LSC-North Harris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFarland, Michael</td>
<td>Faculty, English &amp; SEA Ctr. (LSC-North Harris)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The QEP Development Committee took a practical action research approach to identify options for the QEP focus within the local context of the Lone Star College System. Several activities were scheduled to accomplish this phase of the planning process, including a review of best practices for the first-year experience, scheduling a student success workshop, and conducting campus focus group discussions at the colleges.

1. Review of Effective Practices for the First-Year Experience

The committee reviewed effective practices in the field of first-year experience and compared those with current and prior LSCS initiatives to explore possible opportunities to enhance, augment, or build upon prior local initiatives. In a review of colleges focusing on the first-year experience, efforts typically focused on the following objectives (Barefoot, 2000):

- Increase student-to-student interaction;
- Increase faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class;
- Increase student involvement and time on campus;
- Link the curriculum and the co-curriculum;
- Increase academic expectations and levels of academic engagement; and
- Assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for college. (p. 14)

Barefoot et al. (2005) conducted a case study of thirteen U.S. colleges and universities that have achieved excellence in the way they structure and implement the first year of college, resulting in better than normal student retention, satisfaction, and success rates. The following programmatic areas of emphasis were observed among the institutions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advising</th>
<th>Learning Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Advising Center</td>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Reading</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convocations</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Curriculum</td>
<td>Peer Leaders/Advisors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are many creative initiatives observed among colleges focusing on student success in the first year. Best practices in pursuit of the above objectives include the following (Barefoot & Gardner, 2010):

- First-Year Experience seminar or course (from 1 to 3 credit hours), with major roles for peer mentors and leaders;
- Learning communities between the FYE seminar and a freshman academic course;
- Supplemental Instruction (for freshman courses with high DFWI rates);
- Professional Development for FYE faculty;
- Summer bridge programs;
- Upward Bound and Trio programs;
- Early Intervention and attendance monitoring;
- Academically focused orientation for first year students that is connected to the first year seminar;
- Orientation that includes parents, family;
- Connection built through long-term mentoring relationship with each student;
- True academic advising;
- Targeted advising;
- Faculty advising;
- Peer mentors and leaders;
- Ritual and ceremony (convocation) for arriving students;
- Efforts to build enthusiasm for the institution as students arrive;
- On-campus student employment;
- Opportunities for out-of-class interaction with faculty;
- Honors programs;
- Learning/study skills centers;
- Service Learning;
- Strong partnerships between academic affairs and student services;
- Developmental coursework;
- Encouraging/requiring assistance seeking (example: SI or tutoring is required);
- Encouraging joining behaviors (study groups, co-curricular activities);
- Raising academic expectations; and
- Encouraging full-time enrollment whenever feasible.

2. Student Success Workshop

The selection of First-Year Experience as a theme for the QEP reflects a continued commitment to extend and build upon the work of prior college initiatives to improve student success. College leaders, the QEP Development Committee, and participants from prior initiatives such as Achieving the Dream were brought together to discuss the broad concept of student success, and to share insights concerning our current and past practices, successes, lessons learned, and continuing challenges.
The team next explored the potential focus within the QEP. The meeting assisted the committee to identify trends in certain areas of the first-year experience that might be candidates for further efforts within the QEP.

**Insights from the Workshop**

The following insights were gathered at the workshop:

- **Advising**
  There has been a consistent interest and focus on advising, and it remains an area of interest for the QEP.

- **Analytics**
  Business intelligence, analytics, and technology tools play an important role in all past initiatives, and will play an important role in the QEP. We have progressed organizationally in learning to ask different questions about the work we do.

- **Communication**
  Communication has, is, and likely always will be a challenge.

- **Early Intervention**
  Data from our Achieving the Dream (AtD) effort suggest that the early intervention program has been successful and interest remains for its inclusion in the QEP.

- **Faculty and Staff Development**
  Interest emerged for including faculty and staff development as a component of the QEP.

- **Orientation**
  Orientation is suggested as a mandatory activity for all entering students.

- **Student Success Course**
  Data from our AtD effort suggest that the initial implementations of the student success course have been successful for the students to which it has been targeted. Interest remains to broaden its use to all students and to consider the course when developing the QEP.

**Review of Lone Star College System Initiatives**

The above insights emerged in consideration of prior LSCS initiatives. Summaries of the following initiatives are reviewed below:

- Student Success Initiative (early 2000’s)
Student Success Initiative

The early Student Success Initiative evolved from the college system’s prior accreditation reaffirmation process. To improve student success and retention, the college focused on ensuring that students were academically prepared for college level courses. The initiative had two main components:

- Establish pre-requisites for college level courses.
- Eliminate dual enrollment in developmental and college level courses.

Achieving the Dream

The AtD initiative continued LSCS’s progress for student initiatives and several programs emerged.

- Early Intervention Program:

The Early Intervention (Early Alert) program focused initially on students in developmental math (Introduction to Algebra) and the first college level English course (Composition and Rhetoric I). It was later expanded to include certain developmental English courses. Following the completion of the Achieving the Dream initiative, LSCS is working to expand the service to additional students in other courses.

Students participating in the program showed positive results. However, there were continued challenges to increasing faculty referrals as well as the number of students responding to referrals. Because faculty and student participation is voluntary, a significant percentage of students still completed their course unsuccessfully (with a failing grade) without being referred or without responding if a referral were made. Data for this program revealed:

- Students responding to referral had a fall-to spring retention rate of 76%.
- Students not responding to referral had a fall-to-spring retention rate of 67%.
- Retention gap between struggling students (referred) and those not struggling (not-referred) is 5%.
- In ENGL 1301, only 4% of students who completed the course were referred for assistance. However, 30% of completing students failed the course.
- In MATH 0308, 14% of students who completed the course were referred for assistance. However, 36% of completing students failed the course.

- Student Success Course (EDUC 1300 Learning Frameworks):

The EDUC 1300 course focuses on assisting first-time-in-college (FTIC) students who test into two or more upper-level developmental education courses. The course serves
as the LSCS freshman experience course and includes topics designed to improve
college preparedness.

Enrollment in the course has been voluntary and results have shown approximately a
7% improvement in student completion and retention rates compared to other FTIC
students.

• **Intrusive Advising:**

Intrusive Advising provides case management advising for first-time-in-college students.
Advisors work with students throughout their first semester to ensure that the student
feels connected to college. An advising intervention is considered complete when the
following issues have been discussed with the student:

- academic goals,
- career goals,
- development of an academic plan,
- financial aid and the financial aid process,
- review and referral (as necessary) to campus resources,
- follow-up and preparation for the next semester.

Results of the program show that retention among students who voluntarily participated
in advising was approximately 20% higher than retention rates among other FTIC
students.

However, a significant obstacle for this initiative was voluntary student
participation and the program consequently impacted a relatively low number of students. Therefore,
beginning Fall 2009, advisors were paired with students enrolled in sections of the
EDUC 1300 student success course. This provided greater access to advisors and
resulted in increased student participation. Working with the advisor is now an
assignment in the course worth a portion of the total course grade.

**Strategic Conversations on Student Success**

Concurrent to the Achieving the Dream initiative, the college solicited assistance from a
consultant in 2007 and again in 2010 to facilitate strategic conversations assessing the
current state of student success for LSCS. The consultant analyzed strengths and
weaknesses, evaluated opportunities and challenges, compared those to effective
practices at League for Innovation institutions, and suggested elements of a framework
for increasing student access and success that LSCS might employ in order to maintain
momentum.

Among the recommendations from these two lengthy studies are the following (Culp,
2007, 2010):

- Require new students who need two or more developmental courses to register
  for a student success course during their first twelve credit hours in college.
- Provide all new students with an educational plan clearly outlining the courses
  needed to reach their goals and a support service plan outlining the services they
  must use in order to succeed academically.
- Help undecided students identify educational and career goals.
• Create system-wide and college-based partnerships with academic affairs.
• Foster partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs that increase the chances students will be able to define and reach their educational and career goals.
• Continue focus on advising.
• Provide a mandatory new student orientation.
• Continue focus on early intervention.
• Promote faculty involvement in student success inside and outside of the classroom.
• Provide professional development.
• Define what the system means by the term student success.

**Entering Student Success Institute (ESSI)**

During Spring 2010, college leaders participated in the Center for Community College Student Engagement Entering Student Success Institute in Austin, Texas. Following the Institute a Students’ Right Start Taskforce was convened and provided recommendations for moving forward with two initiatives to help improve student success.

• Require FTIC students who do not test college-ready in Fall 2011 to enroll in the EDUC 1300 student success course.
• Implement mandatory pre-registration orientation in Fall 2011 for all first-time-in-college students (regardless of academic level).
• Moved the late registration period forward, to occur in advance of the beginning of the semester.

The appropriate administrative councils approved the recommendations. Thus, beginning with the Fall 2011 semester, all first-time-in-college students who place into two or more higher-level developmental skills areas will be required to enroll in EDUC 1300. This expansion will effectively quadruple the number of participating students involving approximately 80% of the target population. In addition, intrusive advising has been standardized as a course requirement by the EDUC 1300 curriculum team with the expectation that more students will participate in the advising initiative.

For the pre-registration new student orientation, the following program of activities will be common to all campuses in Fall 2011. The program is approximately 2½ hours in length; with an additional 30 minutes optionally set aside for campus-specific topics if needed.

• Academic Life presentation/activity by faculty member
• Student Services / Campus Resources presentation
• Campus Tour
• Advising 101 presentation
• Academic advising and assistance with registration using My Records
• Each campus will offer some type of Family Orientation programs or activities, determined by each campus.
Foundations of Excellence

Foundations of Excellence (FoE) is a comprehensive, externally guided self-study and improvement process for the first-year experience. The framework for the program consists of principles called Foundational Dimensions®. The Dimensions developed by the Policy Center on the First Year of College (now John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education) guide measurement of institutional efforts and provide an aspirational model for the beginning college experience. The FoE process is implemented through a campus-based task force with broad representation. The study results in the creation of a strategic action plan for campus improvements devoted to the first-year experience.

LSC-North Harris participated in Foundations of Excellence during the 2009-2010 academic year. LSC-Montgomery conducted their FoE study during the 2010-2011 year. The other three colleges have committed to similar FoE studies commencing in the 2011-2012 academic year.

Numerous identified action items from the completed LSC-North Harris Foundations of Excellence study support concepts observed from other college initiatives:

- Increase student connections;
- Increase Campus Awareness of Student Services;
- Train and Evaluate Advisors;
- Track progress of EDUC 1300 students;
- Institute orientations to address standard student behavior;
- Expand early alert;
- Create definable and measureable goals relating to first-year students;
- Increase faculty involvement in student success;
- Provide faculty development; and
- Focus on campus culture change.

3. Campus Focus Groups

The committee conducted fifteen focus group discussions at the five college campuses with students, faculty/staff, or community members. The questions posed were aimed at understanding what college actions would be important to include in an entering student experience designed to meet the needs of first-time-in-college students. Insights from the focus group meetings assisted the committee in identifying possible specific topics and initiatives within the QEP first-year experience theme, as well as possible specific strategies for implementation.

To summarize the many insights received about the first-year experience, we paraphrase one of the comments from the focus groups:

“The first [time] is the worst time in your life.”

The statement paints a bleak picture, but it also is hopeful in suggesting that the first time is not the last time. Indeed, not all comments were negative, and those that spoke about our challenges and shortcomings tended to focus on our processes, not our people. There were many positive comments regarding the LSCS faculty and staff. Inspired by the comment above, the QEP Development Committee worked to develop a
QEP that could catalyze the transformation of our processes and culture so as to nurture a first-year experience that feels more like the “best time.”

*Insights from the Focus Groups:*

- **Access (to services):**
  In some focus groups, participants expressed the need for more quiet study space on campus and extended hours for key services such as the library and learning/tutoring centers.

- **Advising:**
  Students need a personal connection. The advising process plays a critical role in building an initial connection between the college and the student. The right person serving as an advisor makes a difference, as does enabling students to build a long-term relationship with a helpful college employee. Suggested process improvements include the development of an academic advising program that assigns an initial, single, helpful advisor to assist each student through the entire registration process and throughout the first year. In addition, faculty who are trained to advise can assist in increasing the institution’s capacity for true academic advising to support all entering students.

  Suggested logistical improvements include the creation of study plan flowcharts that can be shared between advisors and students to assist in creating plans of study and placing students into correct classes.

- **College Awareness:**
  Students come to college fairly unaware of standard college processes. They also are uninformed concerning the services and support available to assist them. We are challenged to find ways to better communicate this information. Suggestions included disseminating information via campus tours, college preview events, orientations, and through student clubs and organizations. Also requested were better signage on campus, clearer directions, navigation clues, and pathway markings.

- **College Preparedness:**
  Students enter college not only unaware of the basic processes associated with registration, but also unprepared for the expectations associated with succeeding as a college student. Combined with the various outside responsibilities that demand their time, students must quickly discipline themselves to manage time wisely, balance their priorities, and take personal responsibility for their success in college. This involves staying ahead of class reading and homework assignments, learning study skills, and perhaps more profoundly; it involves acquiring a personal goal and an inner motivation for participating in college successfully. It is not enough to simply “be there” and do seat time. In fact, some students are unhappy with their peers who fail to rise to this challenge. Disruptive and/or immature student behavior is not welcome and there is an expectation that students should practice more discipline in the areas of civility, etiquette, proper attire, rudeness, apathy, improper use of cell phones, etc.
The first year course (EDUC 1300) has proven to be a helpful tool to assist students. The common suggestion is to require this course of all entering students. With proper leadership and training, peer leaders and mentors are more effective for helping new students in many contexts – orientation, registration, and the EDUC 1300 course, among others.

• **Communicate & Collaborate:**

  Students are aware of sometimes-poor communication and collaboration among the various student support areas they contact. The early intervention system was viewed as a positive program to help communicate student status among the learning service areas, and to connect struggling students to the assistance they need.

• **Connections:**

  Amidst the confusion of the unknown and the maze of new expectations, students need a personal connection. Making and keeping positive human connections has a constructive impact on the college experience. Its importance cannot be underestimated. Consistent advice from the focus groups articulated the importance of building a relationship with a faculty or staff member who is helpful, nice, and/or kind, and to stick with that person throughout the college career. Students are encouraged to get involved in clubs and organizations. They are also encouraged to get connected with more experienced students who can mentor and help point the way.

  The first class experience can “make or break it” for some students. Faculty play an important role and have a great impact in establishing positive connections. Students appreciate faculty who help them outside of class, are available, listen, help in the tutoring center, or are approachable and easy to talk to. Faculty involvement on campus was described as comforting and helpful. Faculty mentors who reach out and encourage are also important. Several participants made it a point to specifically mention how meaningful it was for them that faculty knew their name. The bottom line is that the faculty connection is the most important connection to make.

• **Financial:**

  Fewer students are able to attend college full-time. They are increasingly juggling their time between handling jobs and family responsibilities. Money is a source of stress and can be overwhelming. The cost of books is an issue and can cause students to enroll in fewer courses than they might have planned.

• **Goals:**

  Generally, students do not know what they want to study when they enter college. They would benefit from a process that assists them in the development of career, degree, and life plans and goals. Once a plan is made, each student should be monitored and assisted in reviewing, updating, and modifying their plan of study.

• **Orientation:**

  Orientations are viewed as helpful, and many suggest that they should be a required activity for entering students. The orientation should serve to communicate to students
what they can expect in the college experience. The use of properly trained peer leaders and mentors would strengthen the planning and delivery of orientations.

• Registration and Financial Aid:

With limited knowledge about college, entering students need guidance and consistent information when attempting to register for classes. The process is laborious and time consuming. Focus group participants requested that the college find ways to make the processes easier, quicker, and less confusing. A checklist would be helpful. Also important is the attitude and receptiveness we demonstrate to new students who arrive on campus; students appreciate friendly customer service.

C. QEP Focus: Best Start

In a review of effective practices for the first-year experience, specific student needs emerged as primarily important for college focus. They also were mentioned in a review of prior LSCS initiatives. Finally, they represented trends in the perspectives shared directly by faculty, staff, the community, and most importantly the students who participated in the campus focus groups.

Focus for the QEP

From the above review of the local context at LSCS and with stakeholders among faculty, staff, students, and the community, the QEP Development Committee agreed that the QEP should focus on the following student needs:

• Students need a personal connection to the college.
• Students need a goal and an educational plan for the goal.
• Students should recognize and address challenges to achieving their goal.

First-Year Experience Guiding Principles

Insights from the committee’s activities revealed several principles about the first-year experience to guide the development of LSCS’s QEP activities:

• Institutions focusing on the first-year experience do not typically focus on one initiative. Better results are achieved when multiple activities are utilized.
• LSCS needs to pursue a holistic approach to training and implementing the QEP, involving both academic affairs and student services.
• Scalable strategies should be incorporated to engage more first-year students.
• LSCS needs to reduce or remove the “optional” aspect of our initiative in order to impact more students.
• Based on effective practices and current LSCS efforts, the opportunity exists to augment current initiatives by focusing on the initial weeks of the first-time-in-college student experience.
QEP Implementation Guidelines:

From the broad-based planning activities and discussions, the QEP Development Committee considered the following implementation concepts as a guide for identifying and developing specific activities and student learning outcomes to address the focus for the QEP.

- Address the three student needs articulated for the focus of the QEP.
- Target students who meet the institutional definition for first-time-in-college (FTIC) student.
- Enhance or build upon current LSCS student success initiatives.
- Impact the learning environment through required activities that remove the "optional" concept.
- Focus on improving student success and retention.
- Support common outcomes across the college system, while incorporating flexible design for college campuses, with a variety of possible options.
- Foster collaboration between academic affairs and student services.

"Best Start" – Definition

The QEP will focus on a specific first-year learning environment and specific student learning outcomes and activities to help students have the “best start” in college so that they will be more likely to stay in college and complete their goals. This will involve helping students to identify a goal and learning plan, as well as barriers to achieving the goal and/or completing the plan of study. The QEP activities will be called the “Best Start” program and will ultimately support improving student success and retention for first-time-in-college students.

QEP Institutional Goals for Best Start:

- Increase by 5% the number of FTIC students participating in Best Start who successfully complete (with grade of C or better) their current enrolled courses.
- Increase by 5% the semester-to-semester retention of FTIC students participating in Best Start.

Strategy for Designing Best Start Outcomes and Activities:

- Modify a learning environment that potentially affects a significant but manageable population of FTIC students.
- Identify roles and collaborative partnerships for academic affairs and student services in helping students accomplish the Best Start activities.
- Focus on flexibility, scalability, and teamwork among college departments.
- Encourage staff from all departments of the college to receive training and participate in assisting students, when and where appropriate.
D. Learning Environment and Learning Outcomes Formation

To sustain the next phase of developing the Quality Enhancement Plan, the QEP Development Committee membership was modified again to support discussions regarding the QEP learning environment and student learning outcomes.

The QEP Development Committee worked during Spring and Summer 2011 with the following members and Chair:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carstens, Ryan (Chair)</td>
<td>Dean, Educational Services (LSC-Tomball)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batiste, Seth</td>
<td>Faculty, DS English (LSC-North Harris)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bezette, Noel</td>
<td>Faculty, EDUC 1300 (LSC-Kingwood)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brandyburg, Lawrance</td>
<td>Dean (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Davis, Lisa</td>
<td>Counselor (LSC-Tomball)</td>
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<td>Dixon, Dorothy</td>
<td>Gates: Model Pathways (System Office)</td>
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<td>Eckenfels, Barbara</td>
<td>Counselor &amp; EDUC faculty (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
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<td>Emeka, Franklin</td>
<td>Faculty, SOCI/Criminal Justice (LSC-Kingwood)</td>
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<td>Gadde, Fonda</td>
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<td>Goss, Suzy</td>
<td>Faculty, Math (LSC-Kingwood)</td>
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<td>Jackson, Mary Ann</td>
<td>Faculty, EDUC 1300 (LSC-Tomball)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Johnson, Jadi</td>
<td>Community member</td>
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<td>Juelg, Butch</td>
<td>Tech. Serv. Director (LSC-North Harris)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kelly, Thomas</td>
<td>Faculty, History (LSC-CyFair)</td>
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<td>Marxhausen, Gail</td>
<td>Faculty, English (LSC-CyFair)</td>
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<td>McFarland, Michael</td>
<td>Faculty, English &amp; SEA Ctr. (LSC-North Harris)</td>
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<td>Miner, Karen</td>
<td>Achieving the Dream Director (System Office)</td>
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<tr>
<td>O'Brien, Catherine</td>
<td>Faculty lead, EDUC 1300 (LSC-CyFair)</td>
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<td>Peyton, Janice</td>
<td>Library Director (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
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<td>Phillips, Claire</td>
<td>Dean (LSC-CyFair)</td>
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<td>Rockefeller, Debra</td>
<td>Compliance/Assessment (System Office)</td>
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<td>Stasney, Rebecca</td>
<td>Faculty, DS English (LSC-CyFair)</td>
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<td>Van Wie, Victoria</td>
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<td>Whileyman, Jean</td>
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<td>Whitley, Martha</td>
<td>Faculty, DS Eng. &amp; SEA Ctr (LSC-North Harris)</td>
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<td>Williams, Wendell</td>
<td>VP for Student Success (LSC-Montgomery)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young, Sherry</td>
<td>Faculty, English &amp; POFT (LSC-Kingwood)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Subsequent meetings were held with various stakeholders involved with or accountable for specific programs normally associated with first-time-in-college-students. The process included meetings with the Vice Presidents Council, instructional division Deans Council, the EDUC 1300 Curriculum Team, the Advising Committee, the Orientation Committee, the chair of the Faculty Advising Proposal committee, and various conversations with campus individuals in instruction and student services.

The purpose of the discussions was to explore various learning environments, possible learning outcomes, and implementation options that might lend themselves to supporting...
the focus of the QEP while meeting the suggested guidelines and principles for the QEP design.

**QEP Learning Environment: the EDUC 1300 Course**

The recently mandated new student orientation presented a strong option for supporting the QEP focus. As of early 2011 when the QEP was still under development, the college was studying options for implementing an administrative process to ensure required student participation in the orientation. Once resolved, there will likely be opportunities to introduce students during orientation to certain ungraded Best Start activities. Until that time, the “optional” concept would remain for orientation and some students would not initially participate if the Best Start program were incorporated into orientation. Another limitation for integrating Best Start activities with the orientation involved the current lack of an implemented system for tracking and grading student participation in activities outside of an enrolled class section contained in the college system's Electronic Resource Planning system (known locally as the “iStar” system).

From a student engagement perspective, a recent study (Capps, 2010) showed that adult college students nationwide are spending less time than ever before on out-of-class college-related activities, and initiatives that depend on out-of-class optional activities have not been successful with today’s students. Thus, to affect fundamental change via the QEP, it was ultimately determined that the QEP should modify the learning environment within a classroom. The classroom approach provides the ability to track enrollments for assessment and offers the opportunity to assign grades for the Best Start activities to thus limit the “optional” concept for students.

The recent administrative decision to require certain first-time-in-college students to attend the EDUC 1300 college success course laid the groundwork to integrate the QEP activities with the EDUC 1300 course in order to focus on first-time-in-college students. The EDUC 1300 course was therefore selected as the classroom learning environment to host the QEP Best Start activities. Likewise, the recent faculty-led decision to require EDUC 1300 students to meet with an advisor offered the holistic approach desired for the QEP.

**QEP Student Learning Outcomes:**

The recently updated learning outcomes associated with the EDUC 1300 course align very well with the student needs that emerged as the focus for the QEP. The strategy for the QEP is therefore to enhance the EDUC 1300 learning environment and course experience, working with two specific and measurable student learning outcomes designed to address the focus of the QEP. The details of the learning outcomes are discussed in chapter 2.

**E. Framework Development**

With the QEP focus and learning environment identified, work commenced to develop specific Best Start student learning outcomes as well as a framework for implementing the Best Start program via instructors in the EDUC 1300 course as well as through the support of various academic and student support areas.
Multiple drafts of the framework for the student learning outcomes were shared with various stakeholders in order to receive feedback. Stakeholders included advising, counseling, EDUC 1300 lead faculty, the orientation committee, Vice Presidents, instructional Deans, and associate Vice Chancellors.

F. Implementation and Timeline

Final working drafts of the QEP framework included implementation steps and a timeline. The information was likewise shared with advising, counseling, EDUC 1300 lead faculty, the orientation committee, Vice Presidents of both instruction and student services, instructional Deans, and associate Vice Chancellors. Institutional research and technology personnel were also consulted since their expertise is necessary to implement data tools to support tracking and assessment of the QEP outcomes and goals.

Finally, a college-wide retreat was scheduled in late June 2011 to discuss the Best Start program with faculty and administration representatives from throughout the system. Newly identified “chairs” for Best Start campus implementation teams assisted in facilitating small-group discussions concerning the implementation concepts and proposed timeline. Feedback received at the retreat was incorporated into the final design for the QEP.

Summary

The broad-based planning process for an institution of this size and complexity involved multiple steps and strategies. The broad-based institutional planning process utilized different types of activities and included stakeholders from throughout the college system. The QEP Development Committee’s planning work identified the theme for the QEP, determined the goals, narrowed the issues of focus, selected an appropriate learning environment for the QEP activities, identified a framework for two student learning outcomes, and developed an implementation plan and timeline for the QEP activities. Details of the outcomes are discussed in chapter 2, while information regarding the implementation is discussed in the subsequent chapters 3 and 4 of this report. Chapter 5 discusses the assessment process for the QEP.

Documentation regarding the QEP planning process can be found at: http://www.LoneStar.edu/QEP.
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II. Focus: Best Start

During the planning process, specific student needs emerged as primarily important for a system focus. From the above review of the local context at LSCS, and with stakeholders among faculty, staff, students, and the community, the QEP Development Committee agreed that the QEP will focus on the following student needs:

- Students need a personal connection to the college.
- Students need a goal and an educational plan for the goal.
- Students should recognize and address challenges to achieving their goal.

To address the identified areas of focus, specific student learning outcomes and activities will be implemented to help students have the “best start” in college so that they will be more likely to stay in college and complete their goals. This will involve helping students to identify a goal and learning plan, barriers to achieving the goal and/or completing the plan of study, as well as possible college support areas that can assist the student toward being successful. The QEP activities will be called the “Best Start” program and they will ultimately support improving student success and retention for first-time-in-college students.

**QEP Institutional Goals for Best Start:**

- Increase by 5% the number of FTIC students participating in Best Start who successfully complete (with grade of C or better) their current enrolled courses.
- Increase by 5% the semester-to-semester retention of FTIC students participating in Best Start.

**A. Student Learning Outcomes**

The QEP will modify the learning environment within a classroom. The classroom approach provides the ability to track enrollments for assessment and offers the opportunity to assign grades for the Best Start activities to thus limit the “optional” concept for students. The EDUC 1300 college success course is the selected classroom learning environment to host the QEP Best Start activities.

The EDUC 1300 course experience will be enhanced by focusing on two specific student learning outcomes that require the student to take actionable steps that can be measured, verified, and assigned a grade. Completion of the class assignments associated with the learning outcomes will require students to connect and interact with other support areas of the college.

**Outcome #1: Students will clarify an educational goal and learning plan.**

- 100% of students who complete EDUC 1300 with the Best Start program will participate in a career exploration and enrollment planning activity, confirm a major or program of study, and select courses to input into the iStar My Planner online tool before the end of the semester.
Outcome #2: Students will identify and address a barrier to their academic success.

- 100% of students who complete EDUC 1300 with the Best Start program will complete a motivational assessment instrument, identify a barrier to their academic success, and develop a plan to address the barrier.

B. Framework for Learning Outcomes

Assisting students to complete the learning outcomes will require collaborative efforts from faculty, academic support, and student service areas of the college. Other college resources such as advising, counseling, student peer mentors, faculty mentors, Student Life clubs and associations, the learning center, and the library will be engaged as well to support the student’s efforts to complete the assigned classroom and out-of-class activities associated with the student learning outcomes.

Below are the frameworks for implementing the learning outcomes via instructors in the EDUC 1300 course as well as through the support of various academic and student support areas.

Outcome #1:
Students will clarify an educational goal and learning plan.

- 100% of students who complete EDUC 1300 with the Best Start program will participate in a career exploration and enrollment planning activity, confirm a major or program of study, and select courses to input into the iStar My Planner online tool before the end of the semester.

The instructor is responsible for selecting strategies for the class activities. Training for the instructor in career exploration, enrollment planning, and the iStar My Planner online tool will include sample instructional approaches (such as listed below) as well as a rubric to assist in evaluating the student’s work.

Instructor: Introduces career exploration and enrollment planning activities and information handouts in class.

Student: Required to research careers using library resources and complete a career exploration paper.

Instructor: Conducts an introductory enrollment planning activity in class, to include handouts for pulling degree plans from transfer schools, pulling LSCS degree requirements sheets online, iStar instructions, etc. Assists the student with general, non-specialized, course selection information.

Instructor: Provides instructions for logging into the iStar My Planner online tool to confirm the program of study and post the selected courses. Instructor can also reference information in the myLoneStar / Student Help Center / How-To Documents section.

Student: Required to follow up with advisor to review final course selections for an enrollment plan and/or to discuss other questions. The advisor signs a
form verifying the plan with the selected courses listed. The student enters the courses into the college system’s iStar My Planner online tool, prints the results, and submits the materials to the instructor for a grade to verify completion of the assignment.

Advising: Meets again with students (as needed, individually or in small groups) to clarify specialized course selection information for the student’s selected program and/or area of interest.

Others: Other college resources such as student peer mentors, Student Life associations, the learning center, library, and faculty mentors can be engaged to provide follow-up iStar training or other guidance to students as they work to complete the assignments.

Others: Additional classroom activities are possible, including discussion of transfer options, guest faculty serving as experts from their fields, etc.

Instructor: Includes two course grades for both assignments associated with the learning outcome.

Instructor: If possible, toward the end of the semester, provides class time and instructions for students to register for the next semester.

**Outcome #2:**

*Students will identify and address a barrier to their academic success.*

- 100% of students who complete EDUC 1300 with the Best Start program will complete a motivational assessment instrument, identify a barrier to their academic success, and develop a plan to address the barrier.

The instructor is responsible for designing and implementing the graded activities to support this outcome. Training for instructors will include methodology for using external student inventories (i.e. the Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory and the Noel-Levitz Mid-Year Student Assessment), available college resources and services, student engagement strategies, ice-breakers, etc. Training will also include sample instructional approaches and a rubric to assist in evaluating the student’s work.

Instructor: Provides introduction regarding common barriers for college students, administers the Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory (CSI) at the beginning of the semester to assist students in identifying their unique strengths and barriers to success, shares information regarding college resources and student associations available to assist the student, and discusses typical strategies for addressing barriers.

Mentor: The instructor, an advisor, or other trained mentor meets with students (individually or in small groups) to assist students in the interpretation of their individual Noel-Levitz CSI results and to assist them in identifying and drafting a plan to address a barrier.
Student: Students will meet with an advisor, counselor, or faculty mentor to discuss strategies to help overcome barriers. Students complete a written assignment that:

a) identifies a barrier to his/her academic success;

b) drafts a plan to address the barrier;

c) documents preliminary implementation of the plan; and

d) includes facilitating mentor’s signature.

Mentor: Faculty, staff, or student peer mentors will be a useful resource for additional in- and out-of-class discussions regarding identifying barriers, college resources, and planning for addressing barriers.

Instructor: Will include a course grade for the assignment, based on the student’s effort to develop and implement a plan. Often students do not completely overcome a barrier within a semester, so the outcome of the student’s effort is not graded. What is important is whether the student identified a barrier and then took actionable steps to address the barrier or not.

Instructor: Administers the Noel-Levitz Mid-Year Student Assessment (MYSA) at the end of the semester to assess the impact of Best Start activities and measure student changes from the beginning of the semester.

C. Supportive Research

Results of the committee’s exploration of the first-year experience theme include a review of literature, examinations of similar QEPs from other colleges, LSCS activities or initiatives, and the LSCS strategic goals that will be addressed by a QEP focused on the first-year experience.

1. Literature

The “First-Year Experience” (FYE) is a concept that describes the academic, intellectual, social and emotional development of students during the first year of college. Research suggests that the experiences of the first year of college have a strong impact upon student success (Upcraft, et al., 2004).

John Gardner (2008) of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience cites another important objective of first-year experience activities, which is to provide an opportunity for students to mature while they prepare to make important choices that will influence the rest of their lives. Because the first year of college shapes not only the student but also his or her future, it is important to select programs and activities that have significant impact on student success.

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) state, “we believe freshmen succeed when they make progress toward fulfilling their educational and personal goals” (p. 2). This includes:

- developing academic and intellectual competence;
- establishing and maintaining relationships;
- developing an identity;
deciding on a career and life-style; and
developing an integrated philosophy of life. (Upcraft, 1984)

Objectives of First-Year Experience and Comparative QEP Efforts

As colleges and universities respond to the challenges of entering students, Betsy Barefoot (2000), a fellow with the National Resource Center, finds in a review of colleges focusing on the first-year experience that efforts typically focused on the following objectives:

- Increase student-to-student interaction;
- Increase faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class;
- Increase student involvement and time on campus;
- Link the curriculum and the co-curriculum;
- Increase academic expectations and levels of academic engagement;
- Assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for college. (p. 14)

While the list is not exclusive, it is also illustrative of several recent QEP activities.

First-year experience programs that strive to increase student-to-student interaction often create cohorts of students. This design increases the opportunities for peer interaction. Learning communities are one example of this type of interaction. In learning communities, students are linked to others through ongoing social interactions afforded by being with the same students for an extended period of time. Zhao and Kuh (2004) examined the relationships between participation in learning communities and student engagement and found that participation in a learning community is positively linked to engagement, self-reported outcomes and student satisfaction with college.

As an example, the Flagler College QEP focuses on student-to-student interaction via the creation of first-year learning communities among three linked courses. In the executive summary, Flagler College (2008) describes the QEP as a focus on building a campus ethos to foster student engagement, cultivate the value of academic challenge, improve written and oral communication skills, promote an integrated interdisciplinary approach to learning, and foster deep learning. The college sees the QEP as a beginning for incorporating learning communities throughout students’ entire academic experience.

Other first-year experience programs increase academic expectation and levels of academic engagement. Barefoot (2000) finds that many colleges develop new student orientations “to change student attitudes and expectations by including academic programs and activities during the time period when new students form initial impressions of what college is going to be about” (p. 17).

As a means of preparing students for intense academic engagement, many colleges are including a reading focus in first-year orientation courses or activities. For example, Maysville Community and Technical College’s (2008) QEP focuses on incorporating critical reading strategies into the first-year experience course. These strategies will not only be taught in the orientation course but will be also implemented in discipline-specific courses. Thus, the orientation course not only introduces the college and academic environment but also teaches the foundations of content reading.
Still other first-year experience programs assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for college. Barefoot (2000) finds that some of these programs take the form of workshops, study skills courses, and summer programs while others extend into the high schools. These first-year experience programs recognize that many students are not prepared for the rigors of college level study. Therefore it is common for first-year experience activities to attempt to bridge the gap between where students are academically and where they should be. One focus of Big Sandy Community and Technical College’s (2008) QEP involves working with high school partners to align curriculum and to assist with student placement in entry-level collegiate courses with the goal of increased success rates for the students.

Another objective of first-year experience activities is to assist students in addressing challenges to college preparedness in order to improve their opportunity for academic success. Responses from the LSCS survey ranking possible QEP themes pointed toward the need to help students address various issues arising during the transition to college. During the preliminary research phase of this project, participant comments ranged from the need to address entering students’ lack of preparation for the college environment to the importance of the first year as a crucial part of students’ academic success.

Institutional Characteristics and Student Success

Barefoot et al. (2005) conducted a case study of thirteen colleges and universities in the United States that have achieved excellence in the way they structure and implement the first year of college, resulting in better than normal student retention, satisfaction, and success rates. A qualitative in-depth analysis of the selected institutions was conducted and the following characteristics were observed among these better-performing institutions:

1. Institutions that achieve first-year excellence prioritize first-year needs and issues among competing institutional priorities and accept a significant share of the responsibility for first-year student achievement.
2. Leadership at multiple levels is essential to the achievement of excellence.
3. Excellence flourishes in a culture that encourages idea generation, pilot projects, and experimentation.
4. Excellence in the first year is achieved through efforts designed for all or for a critical mass of first-year students.
5. Assessment is an essential component of moving toward and sustaining excellence.
6. Of the campuses that achieve first-year excellence, a common characteristic is clarity of institutional identity and mission and a concomitant respect for students.
7. Excellence in the first year relies on the direct involvement of an institution’s faculty.
8. Excellence in the first year requires attention to pedagogy in first-year courses.
9. First-year excellence necessitates both creative acquisition and judicious use of financial resources.
10. A central component of excellence is a steady outward gaze—the willingness to learn from and share with others.
11. Excellence rests on an intentional first-year curriculum and on supportive curricular structures.
12. Excellence thrives in an environment where divisional walls are down. (Barefoot, et al., 2005, pp. 381-392)

In a similar but broader nationwide study, Kuh et al. (2005) conducted the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project, a two-year case study of 20 institutions reporting strong performance in student success. The diverse set of higher education institutions were selected from a pool of 700 participating National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) schools.

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to discover and document policies, programs, practices, and conditions that contributed to high performing organizations and student success. The result of Kuh’s comprehensive research efforts yielded the following insights into characteristics of high performing educational institutions and student success, organized into four main themes:

**Leadership:**
- strong senior leadership with a strong sense of purpose;
- leaders articulate and model core values and principles;
- leaders exist throughout the organization and they help establish and sustain the culture that supports student success;
- goals are widely known, well defined, and place student success at the center of the work;

**Partnerships:**
- a strong respect exists between faculty, administration, and student support services;
- to achieve student success, it is critical to build cross-campus collaborations;
- a sense of responsibility for quality and student success is shared across all departments of the institution;
- across the organization, collaboration flows from a shared understanding of the institution’s purpose and operating principles;
- administration, faculty, staff, and students work together to create and maintain efforts supporting student success;

**Student Agency:**
- students take greater responsibility for their college experiences;
- students are accountable to one another for the quality of their group learning experiences;

**Power of One:**
- the institution has individual employees who choose to make a difference in the life of the campus, by informally adding to the culture, providing unique dimensions to the student experience, contributing to a supportive campus climate, and energizing and encouraging others around them to perform their best. (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004; Kuh, et al., 2005)
2. Effective Practices

Levitz and Noel (1989) state that students leave college due to a combination of seven complex factors:

- academic boredom;
- sense of irrelevancy;
- limited or unrealistic expectations of college;
- academic underpreparedness;
- transition or adjustment difficulties;
- uncertainty about a major and/or career;
- dissonance or incompatibility

They argue that in order to improve persistence and success for new students, colleges need to build a connection by developing programs and services that help students "(1) connect to the environment, (2) make the transition to college, (3) work toward their goals in terms of academic major, degree, and career, and (4) succeed in the classroom" (p. 71).

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2009) echoes the importance of building a connection. Based on their 2009 survey findings they state, “Personal connections are the unanticipated success factor—a critical variable that improves the odds of persistence” (p. 3). They further indicate that while most students consider dropping out of college, the reason they stay in school almost always includes a person such as an instructor, staff member, or another student who provided encouragement, guidance, or support.

What effective practices help to achieve a connection? Barefoot et al. (2005) conducted a case study of thirteen U.S. colleges and universities that have achieved excellence in the way they structure and implement the first year of college, resulting in better than normal student retention, satisfaction, and success rates. The following programmatic areas of emphasis were observed among the institutions:

- Advising
- Central Advising Center
- Common Reading
- Convocations
- Core Curriculum
- Experiential Learning and Portfolios
- Faculty Development
- First-Year Seminars
- Leadership Programs
- Learning Centers
- Learning Communities
- Liberal Arts
- Mentoring
- Orientation
- Peer Leaders/Advisors
- Residence Life
- Service Initiatives
- Academic Programs
- Summer Supplemental Instruction
- Use of Technology

There are many creative initiatives observed among colleges focusing on student success in the first year. Best practices in pursuit of the common first-year experience objectives include the following (Barefoot & Gardner, 2010):

- First-Year Experience seminar or course (from 1 to 3 credit hours), with major roles for peer mentors and leaders;
• Learning communities between the FYE seminar and a freshman academic course;
• Supplemental Instruction (for freshman courses with high DFWI rates);
• Professional Development for FYE faculty;
• Summer bridge programs;
• Upward Bound and Trio programs;
• Early Intervention and attendance monitoring;
• Academically focused orientation for first year students that is connected to the first year seminar;
• Orientation that includes parents, family;
• Connection built through long-term mentoring relationship with each student;
• True academic advising;
• Targeted advising;
• Faculty advising;
• Peer mentors and leaders;
• Ritual and ceremony (convocation) for arriving students;
• Efforts to build enthusiasm for the institution as students arrive;
• On-campus student employment;
• Opportunities for out-of-class interaction with faculty;
• Honors programs;
• Learning/study skills centers;
• Service Learning;
• Strong partnerships between academic affairs and student services;
• Developmental coursework;
• Encouraging/requiring assistance seeking (example: SI or tutoring is required);
• Encouraging joining behaviors (study groups, co-curricular activities);
• Raising academic expectations; and
• Encouraging full-time enrollment whenever feasible.

For collaborative efforts to improve student success, Hunter, Henscheid, and Mouton (2007) offer a specific approach. They suggest linking academic advising with first-year seminars: “One way to achieve a comprehensive approach to student transition issues, student success strategies, academic orientation to the institution, career exploration, and decision making strategies may well be through linking these two important initiatives” (p. 104).

3. Lone Star College System Initiatives

The selection of First-Year Experience as a theme for the QEP reflects a continued commitment to extend and build upon the work of prior college initiatives. The following first-year experience initiatives were discussed in chapter 1:

• Student Success Initiative (early 2000’s);
• Achieving the Dream (2005-2010);
• Strategic Conversations on Student Success (2007 and 2010);
• Center for Community College Student Engagement Entering Student Success Institute (Spring 2010); and
Two faculty-led adhoc committees developed proposals during the 2010-2011 academic year and findings were shared in Spring 2011. Their reports have relevance to the QEP and reflect interests among faculty that affirm the substantive issues of the QEP.

**Faculty Advising Proposal**

Faculty developed a proposal that offers a framework for faculty to optionally participate in the advising process as part of institutional service within the college’s faculty workload policy. Several types of advising were proposed, including working with first-time-in-college students. The proposal supports the recommendation of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) who find that the inclusion of faculty in the advising process will increase faculty-student connections and encourage student persistence.

The proposal reveals that many faculty wish to participate in advising and are willing to receive training in order to do so. The QEP framework developed for supporting the Best Start learning outcomes includes the option for faculty and staff to participate as mentors, thus the faculty advising proposal provides insights that will be beneficial during the pilot and implementation of the QEP.

**Chancellor’s Ad Hoc Committee on Student Success**

The Chancellor of the college system commissioned a faculty-led task force to develop a broader definition for student success at LSCS. They developed two documents. The first, entitled “What We Believe About Student Success” (2011b), contains these six statements:

1. **We believe**, in the context of a community college, student success means that students achieve their individual goals as participants in the college community.

2. **We believe** the community college plays a vital role in assisting and guiding students in setting goals that are realistic and attainable and yet challenge the students to achieve their full potential.

3. **We believe** successful community college students operate on timelines that do not match traditional expectations, and that understanding student success should include recognition of completion of specific short term steps on the path to long term goals.

4. **We believe** student success requires a healthy partnership between administrators, support services, faculty and students, each taking responsibility for their respective roles.

5. **We believe** student success is maximized when students are challenged to achieve high standards of excellence.

6. **We believe** student success is the core mission of the Lone Star College System. It is vital to the achievement of this mission to gather data to research our effectiveness and to learn from the data we find. As our students are diverse in their goals and experiences, an array of new measures will be required to address this diversity. (pp. 1-3)
The committee’s second document, “Proposals to the Chancellor” (2011a), includes numerous recommendations that parallel the work of the QEP Development Committee and the design of the QEP. The Chancellor has commissioned a new committee for Fall 2011 to begin the work of bringing the recommendations from the Committee on Student Success to implementation. As a parallel study that occurred while the QEP was under development, the adhoc committee’s recommendations synergistically affirm the relevance of the QEP’s Best Start learning outcomes and framework. The committee proposals offer insights into possible future initiatives that could bridge with the QEP activities to help students maintain momentum toward a “best finish” in college. Highlights of recommendations are listed below:

**Measuring achievement of student goals:**

We recommend an independent as well as integrated approach to documenting student goals. By the end the first semester, initial goals could be established, to be revisited at different points in the student’s academic career with Lone Star College. A relationship with an advisor, faculty member or mentor would be valuable as a contact who would assist in modifying, measuring and reporting on the progress of the student towards the established goals. (p. 1)

**Track students taking EDUC 1300 as a cohort:**

Although students’ goals upon entering the course may not be well developed, by the end of the semester we should have a good sample of students with well articulated goals who we can track over several semesters. … We can track them at the end of the next several long semesters to see if they are achieving their long and short term goals or whether those goals have evolved. … It would be valuable to be able to measure what percentage of students achieve their stated goals within the timeline they have identified and instructive to find out what obstacles may get in their way. (p. 2)

**Use data we already collect to measure aspects of student success:**

“Some elements of student success are already measured using data we have readily available now. This is good data and we affirm that we should continue to use it and emphasize it” (p. 3). This includes current National Community College Benchmark Program metrics such as student completion, success, and retention. Also proposed are additional data such as student goal attainment.

**Tracking documented achievement of course learning outcomes:**

Develop assessments of learning outcomes and use the data as a measure of success in addition to grade distributions: “It would be necessary to confirm the standardization of learning outcomes and then manage the consistent application of the outcomes system-wide” (p. 5).
4. **Lone Star College Strategic Plan (2012-2015)**

The QEP theme of first-year experience supports the following updated 2012-2015 Lone Star College System Strategic Goals (2009):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Initiative</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1: Increase completion and achievement of all students.</td>
<td>• 1.1 Strengthen all academic and student support services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1.3 Develop a method to track student goals and completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1.4 Strengthen clarity of degree program course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 2: Provide high quality academic instruction.</td>
<td>• 2.1 Maintain faculty driven academic review process of programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2.2 Make accountability and performance transparent to stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2.3 Maintain high academic standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2.5 Develop faculty driven outcome assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 3: Provide quality student focused service.</td>
<td>• 3.2 Improve visibility of student and online support services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 3.4 Promote student engagement and connectivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 3.5 Enhance quality and visibility of extra-curricular and student organizations across the system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Capability for Best Start

The development and implementation of Best Start requires a collaborative effort from multiple areas of the system and campus communities. As a multi-campus system, selected resources are shared and managed from the system office, while many academic and student support areas are locally organized at the colleges. Each college president is empowered to organize and manage campus resources to fulfill the shared mission, goals, and student success objectives of the system. Within the organizational context of the Lone Star College System, the ideal implementation strategy involves the development of a framework of commonly shared objectives, outcomes, and assessments while empowering college leaders to leverage resources toward their achievement in a manner that is optimized for each campus environment.

Actions for supporting the Best Start activities and learning outcomes were carefully considered and reviewed by a broad group of faculty, advisors, counselors, administration, and other staff. As mentioned in the prior chapters, a review of research and effective practices informed the process, while insights from prior system initiatives were also taken into consideration. The identified QEP processes and actions represent a pragmatic approach and framework toward achieving the institutional goals and learning outcomes in a collaborative manner across multiple campuses in the college system.

This chapter provides an overview of the implementation actions, timeline, and resources associated with achieving the goals of the QEP and implementing the QEP student learning outcomes.

A. Actions to be Implemented

Actions supporting the QEP are described below within five major organizational processes: planning & coordination, implementation, assessment, professional development, and communications.

Planning & Coordination

Planning and coordination activities include the following highlights.

Pre-SACS visit:

- Final discussions and planning for the QEP submission to SACS.
- Conduct system-wide retreat for stakeholders to promote awareness and solicit feedback regarding implementation.
- Develop final draft of QEP document.
- Develop position descriptions for Best Start personnel.
- Identify external assessment provider.
- Identify Best Start system and campus personnel and committees.
- Prepare for SACS visit and on-site review.
**QEP Pilot:**

- Create and test working model of classroom lessons and activities.
- Clarify faculty and advisor roles for supporting Best Start activities.
- Launch pilot implementation of the Best Start program.
- Incorporate SACS suggestions and recommendations.

**Annual QEP Planning Cycle:**

- Preparations for annual implementation
- Annual Best Start data report to leadership, Deans, faculty, student services, Best Start campus teams, external reviewer, etc.
- Annual Best Start data report to college community
- Evaluation report for Best Start program based on prior assessments, two external reviews, and focus groups
- Budget and program proposals based on evaluation report
- Final budget planning
- Preparations for orientations and semester opening weeks

**Subsequent Years:**

- Explore options to broaden participation in Best Start activities among additional FTIC student populations.

**Implementation**

Implementation of the QEP Best Start program involves efforts and activities from multiple instructional and support areas of the college.

**Logistics**

Coordination of Best Start activities among various areas of the college will require logistical support. A Best Start Faculty Fellow at the system office will coordinate system-wide efforts. Best Start Implementation Teams will be established at each campus to support local implementation. A part-time coordinator position will be established at each college to assist the Best Start Implementation Team with logistical support.

**Instructional Divisions**

The Quality Enhancement Plan focuses on supporting and enhancing the classroom learning environment through teaching and learning activities supporting two learning outcomes for first-time-in-college students enrolled in the college system's learning frameworks course, known as Education 1300 (or EDUC 1300). The course serves as the system’s college preparation or first-year seminar course.
Instructional divisions with supervision for the EDUC 1300 course will participate in supporting the Best Start activities hosted by the course. Deans, division managers, coordinators, and faculty chairs who work with EDUC 1300 faculty will support the various processes related to the program, such as assisting to track employee training status, schedule-building of course sections, etc.

Instructors assigned to EDUC 1300 sections will teach the Best Start lessons and activities in support of the QEP learning outcomes. The Best Start program will be incorporated into the EDUC 1300 course as part of the faculty assignment associated with teaching the class.

**Classroom Environment: Teaching & Learning**

The framework for supporting the QEP’s two student learning outcomes is detailed in chapter 2 of this report. A working model of lesson plans for the learning outcomes will be developed by design subcommittee Summer 2011 and tested in a small number of EDUC 1300 classrooms during the Fall 2011 semester (one or two per campus location). The lesson plans will include teaching and learning activities and assignments supporting the two QEP learning outcomes for first-time-in-college students enrolled in the college system’s learning frameworks course (EDUC 1300).

The lesson plans will include the use of two Noel-Levitz student assessments. Faculty will provide initial classroom discussions to explain how to interpret the assessment reports and to foster analysis of the results among students. The first instrument, the Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory (CSI), will be administered at the beginning of the semester. It will provide insights for the student, faculty, advisor or mentor, and other student support areas regarding each student’s strengths, challenges, motivation, and receptivity to assistance. Each student will use his/her individual CSI assessment report to help complete the classroom assignments associated with the two Best Start learning outcomes.

As a follow-up assessment of the Best Start activities, the Noel-Levitz Mid-Year Student Assessment (MYSA) will be offered at the end of the semester to students who complete the graded Best Start lessons and activities. The instrument provides program assessment data, creates the opportunity for a follow-up visit with an advisor, measures any shifts that might occur in the above metrics from the beginning of the semester after the student has completed the Best Start activities and assignments, and provides institutional planning insights for college academic and student support areas.

Rubrics for the Best Start learning outcomes will be developed Fall 2011. Following the limited working model of the classroom lessons in Fall 2011, pilot implementation of Best Start activities will occur in Spring 2012.

During the pilot phase and full implementation of the Best Start program, instructors for EDUC 1300 will facilitate the Best Start classroom lessons and activities as part of the EDUC 1300 course teaching assignment. Colleges may choose to include advisors, faculty advisors or mentors, or student peer mentors to assist faculty and students in the classroom during the activities.

Because the Best Start lesson plans will include both faculty and advisors working with the students as they complete the learning assignments, faculty and advisor roles for
supporting Best Start activities will be clarified Fall 2011 when the working model of the lessons is put into practice in an active classroom setting.

**Advising**

Advisors or counselors will be assigned to each section of EDUC 1300. They will conduct follow-up meetings with students as part of the Best Start required course activities. The meeting will include a discussion regarding a plan of study and selection of courses, the interpretation of results from the Noel-Levitz CSI assessment instrument, discussion of the student’s perceived strengths and challenges identified by the assessment, identification of a challenge to address and possible strategies and/or college support areas available to assist in addressing the challenge.

Faculty seeking to provide advising or mentoring as part of their institutional service (pending administrative approval) may participate in follow-up meetings with Best Start students – per college guidelines and available faculty and college resources.

**Academic Support**

Student learning activities associated with the Best Start lessons are designed to help connect students to various support areas that might assist them with their identified barriers. The Best Start learning activities will be supported outside of class with assistance from peer mentors, the advising office, the library, the learning center, the early intervention program or other college designated areas – per available faculty and college resources. Academic and student service areas will likely see growth in students served as students access services in fulfillment of the Best Start activity requirements.

Student peer mentors will be utilized (per campus option) in or out of class for testimonials and to assist as coaches for logistical activities such as working on the computer in the iStar My Planner tool.

Advisors, learning center staff, or other employees trained to support Best Start activities may be invited by faculty to assist with instructional activities – per available faculty and college resources. Faculty may wish to have advisors present in the classroom to observe and assist instructors with the activities.

Faculty who wish to facilitate Best Start activities as a faculty advisor or mentor working with students enrolled in EDUC 1300 classes (in sections that they do not teach) may participate in Best Start training to qualify. Facilitation of Best Start activities may qualify for credit toward institutional service requirements (pending administrative approval from their Dean per the proposed faculty advising guidelines, and approval from the college advising office).

College full-time and part-time staff (including faculty or adjuncts) completing Best Start Certification and assigned part-time to facilitate Best Start activities as a mentor in specific class sections not already assigned to them as a faculty member or an adjunct will serve as part-time employees of the advising office and will be compensated according to college HR guidelines (for full-time faculty, this would be credit for institutional service).
New student orientations will be modified to explain and market the “Best Start” program, beginning Spring and Summer 2012. Based on college resources, orientation programs may optionally include learning activities designed specifically to introduce the Best Start program and to prepare students to fulfill the course requirements of the Best Start activities.

Assessment

Assessments will be conducted to assess institutional goals, student learning outcomes, and the implementation of the Best Start program. Details of the assessment activities are provided in chapter 5 of this report.

Collection of data will occur via aggregation of the external student assessment instruments, a review of randomly selected student class assignment submissions (based on rubrics to be developed by the Best Start Assessment Subcommittee), assembling reports from the college enterprise resource planning system (a Peoplesoft implementation known locally as “iStar”), and receipt of an annual external analysis and review of student data by Noel-Levitz.

The college will utilize aggregate assessment reports to identify top issues and trends among students so as to assist in aligning support services to provide assistance as students work through the Best Start activities. An additional external assessment report will be created annually to provide predictive modeling to guide college service areas in proactively planning and designing appropriate interventions to anticipated student challenges and needs.

Regular (monthly) electronic meetings will be held with the external consulting team to chart progress and assess outcomes data.

Professional Development

Professional development will play a key role in building institutional capability for implementing the QEP. A Best Start Faculty Fellow will coordinate professional development with assistance from the system Office of Professional Development, and in consultation with designated system office leadership, the Best Start Steering Committee, campus professional development managers, and the Best Start Assessment Subcommittee.

The professional development program will support:

- Training for initial Best Start Certification of faculty, advisors, mentors, and faculty advisors.
- Recurring training options for faculty and staff.
- Training for student peer mentors who support Best Start (i.e. Student Ambassadors, Phi Theta Kappa, Honors, Student Government Assoc., key clubs on campuses, and former Best Start students).

Field trips will be planned for visits to other colleges in the region to promote exploration of first-year experience practices and gain insights from other practitioners.
An online repository will be developed for use by faculty teaching the Best Start activities in the EDUC 1300 course. The repository will include sample teaching materials, effective practices, an idea exchange, action research reports and findings, etc.

An annual system-wide Symposium will be scheduled to include a review of assessment data, guest expert speakers, focus groups to assess training, classroom lessons, and assessment rubrics, discussions of effective practices among LSCS Best Start faculty, advisors, and staff, student panel discussions, certification training options, and training for student peer mentors.

Initial Certification Requirements:

- Academic Deans, Chairs, and student services leaders who supervise faculty or staff participating in the Best Start program will be encouraged to also attend training.
- Instructors for EDUC 1300.
- Other instructors seeking to facilitate Best Start activities as a faculty advisor or mentor.
- Advising staff participating in the Best Start activities.
- Other college staff seeking to participate in the Best Start program (with supervisor approval).

Renewal Training:

- Faculty and staff participating in the Best Start program will be required to renew certification annually through participation in recurring training opportunities.
- Recurring training will be developed based on input from the Best Start Steering Committee and ongoing assessments of the program.
- Multiple events will be planned each year.
- Online components will be developed in later years.

Training Curriculum Design:

- Initial Best Start training will be developed by a design team composed of counselors, advisors and/or advising managers, instructors, and a librarian, working with the office of Professional Development and the Chair of the Best Start Assessment Subcommittee.
- To facilitate the partnership between academic affairs and student services, training activities and events will be designed for a combined audience of faculty and staff participants whenever possible. Common training activities will include elements important for both faculty and advisors or other staff supporting the Best Start activities (i.e. explanation of the Best Start Program, student preparedness, student characteristics, career exploration, basic enrollment planning, use of external assessment instruments and tools, etc.).
- Specialized training content will be developed and delivered separately for EDUC 1300 faculty hosting the Best Start lesson activities in their class, and for advisors or other staff who participate in the follow-up activities supporting the lessons.

   As an example, specialized content for faculty might include student engagement strategies, learning student names, ice-breakers, etc. while specialized content for advisors might include National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) training
modules, or more sophisticated information and approaches for case-management advising and/or complex degree planning.

- Training will be reviewed/revised according to the assessment plan by Professional Development in consultation with the Best Start Steering Committee and the Chair of the Best Start Assessment Subcommittee, based on assessment data, such as focus group insights from faculty and advisors, prior training surveys, feedback from students, feedback from academic service areas or other program participants, etc.
- Based on the focus of the training, the content for training will be developed with assistance from stakeholders among participating faculty and staff.

Trainers:

- Initial training will be provided by college practitioners and an external assessment partner.
- Train-the-trainer events will be conducted annually by the external assessment partner.
- Specialized training events will include other external consultants and experts such as NACADA speakers, national FYE leaders, or other external providers, based on needs emerging through the ongoing assessment process.
- Other training events will be delivered via Best Start personnel, faculty, advisors or other qualified staff identified by Professional Development or the Best Start committees.

Schedule:

- Developed and coordinated by the Best Start Faculty Fellow with assistance from the Office of Professional Development.
- Initial certification training events will be scheduled in June, August, and January each year.
- Certification renewal events will occur twice per semester.
- The schedule will attempt to accommodate various delivery formats and venues.

Communications

Institutional communications will include promotional materials and activities planned for marketing the Best Start program to students, development of information to include in printed and online class schedules, communications materials to include in new student orientations, a Best Start website (http://www.Lonestar.edu/BestStart), and information to be shared in recurring adjunct in-service meetings, instructional division meetings, and academic or student support staff meetings.

Reporting of Best Start assessments and evaluations will be accomplished through administrative, planning, and training meetings, compiled reports, and electronic communications.

Consulting conference calls with the external assessment consultant will be regularly scheduled during each semester to chart progress and assess outcomes data.
B. Timeline

The table below outlines the timeline for the QEP activities supporting the Best Start program.

Table 3.1: Timeline for QEP Activities Supporting Best Start

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sem.</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sum 2011</td>
<td><strong>Planning and Coordination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Final discussions and planning for the QEP submission to SACS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conduct system-wide retreat for stakeholders to promote awareness and solicit feedback regarding implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop final draft of QEP document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Implementation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recruit and identify EDUC 1300 faculty to participate in a working model of Best Start activities in one or two Fall 2011 class sections per campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Modify syllabus for a small group of designated Fall 2011 EDUC 1300 sections to include Best Start activities and library information literacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Professional Development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop pilot training curriculum for EDUC 1300 instructors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide initial training to EDUC 1300 instructors testing the working model of two Best Start lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Communications</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Distribute internal awareness communications for faculty and staff – May.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Plan internal awareness events and materials for students. Develop and distribute for use early Fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop, purchase, distribute internal awareness communications for faculty and staff for distribution in early Fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Construct Best Start web site: <a href="http://www.Lonestar.edu/BestStart">http://www.Lonestar.edu/BestStart</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td><strong>Planning &amp; Coordination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SACS visit and on-site review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clarify faculty and advisor roles for supporting Best Start activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Best Start data report to leadership, Deans, faculty, student services, Best Start campus teams, external reviewer, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Implementation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Test working model of Best Start learning activities within a small number of designated EDUC 1300 sections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Initial external analytics and implementation review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Revise instruction, implementation processes and activities for pilot implementation in Spring 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify faculty participants and add Best Start class attribute to selected Spring 2012 EDUC 1300 sections (40% of sections/college).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Modify Spring 2012 orientation to include Best Start information (pilot).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Retroactively add Best Start class attribute in iStar to Fall 2011 EDUC 1300 sections participating in the working model.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | • Develop Best Start information for the Spring 2012 class schedule to
promote the program to FTIC students.

Assessment

• Identify methods in iStar to label and track Best Start sections of EDUC 1300 and a checklist for tracking student activities.
• Develop rubric for assessing the Best Start learning outcomes.
• Pilot use of iStar class attribute and checklists in designated Best Start EDUC 1300 sections and students participating in the working model.
• Assess current semester learning outcomes.
• Assess rubrics, training, and lessons via focus groups.

Professional Development

• Provide initial training for Noel-Levitz assessments and web tools.
• With feedback from summer training and the Fall 2011 faculty participants, develop Best Start Certification training for pilot delivery in Dec 2011 or Jan 2012 for Spring 2012 instructors and advisors in full pilot.

Communications

• Distribute internal awareness communications for students – early Fall.
• Distribute internal QEP and Best Start awareness communications for faculty and staff – early Fall.
• Develop Best Start information for the Spring 2012 class schedule to explain the pilot program to students.
• Develop and share marketing materials for pilot sections of Spring 2012 EDUC 1300. Share with orientation and advising offices – Oct/Nov.

Spring 2012 Planning & Coordination

• Launch pilot implementation of the Best Start program.
• Incorporate SACS suggestions and recommendations.
• Budget and program proposals based on initial data from pilot

Implementation

• Pilot Best Start activities in 40% of EDUC 1300 sections (~10/campus).
• Modify orientation to include updated Best Start information, as well as optional preparatory activities to support Best Start learning outcomes.
• Add Best Start class attribute to all Summer and Fall 2012 EDUC 1300 sections, and in subsequent semester schedules.
• Update the Best Start information for the Summer and Fall 2012 class schedule to explain and market the program to FTIC students.

Assessment

• Compile/analyze data from Fall 2011 working model EDUC 1300 sections.
• Assess completion, retention, and success (Fall - Spring).
• Assess current semester learning outcomes.
• Review feedback from pilot implementation.

Professional Development

• Best Start Certification training for Summer and Fall 2012 instructors and advisors – late Spring.
• Annual train-the-trainer session for Best Start personnel

Communications

• Develop and share Best Start marketing materials for upcoming semesters (ongoing) – share with orientation, instruction, and advising offices.
### Summer Planning & Coordination
**2012**
- Final budget planning
- Preparations for full implementation

**Implementation**
- Revise instruction and implementation processes based on assessment data.

**Assessment**
- Compile/analyze data from Spring 2012 pilot.
- Assess current semester learning outcomes.

**Professional Development**
- Review/revise training based on assessment data.
- Planning for online repository.
- Best Start Certification training for instructors and advisors – late Summer.
- Plan Fall 2012 semester renewal training activities.

**Communications**
- Share Best Start marketing materials with orientation, instruction, and advising offices.

### Fall Planning & Coordination
**2012**
- FTIC students who test into **two or more** upper-level developmental courses will participate in Best Start in all EDUC 1300 sections.
- Best Start data report to leadership, Deans, faculty, student services, Best Start campus teams, external reviewer, etc.

**Implementation**
- Full implementation of Best Start activities in EDUC 1300.
- Update the Best Start information for the Spring class schedule to explain the program to participating students.
- Revise lessons and implementation processes based on assessment data.

**Assessment**
- Assess completion, retention, and success (Fall - Fall).
- Assess current semester learning outcomes (with longitudinal comparison).
- Annual external analytics and implementation review
- Assess rubrics, training, and lessons via focus groups.

**Professional Development**
- Review/revise training based on assessment data.
- Provide two Best Start renewal training events.
- Best Start Certification training for instructors and advisors – late Fall.
- Plan Spring renewal training activities.

**Communications**
- Develop and share updated Best Start marketing materials for upcoming semester – share with orientation and advising offices – October.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Planning &amp; Coordination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Spring 2013 & Beyond | • Best Start data report to college community  
• Evaluation report for Best Start program based on prior assessments, two external reviews, and focus groups  
• Budget and program proposals based on evaluation report |

**Implementation**

• Update the Best Start information for the Fall class schedule to explain the program to participating students.

**Assessment**

• Assess completion, retention, and success (Fall - Spring).  
• Assess current semester learning outcomes (with longitudinal comparison).  

**Professional Development**

• Review/revise training based on assessment data.  
• Provide two Best Start renewal training events.  
• Best Start Certification training for instructors and advisors – late Spring.

**Communications**

• Develop and share updated Best Start marketing materials for upcoming semesters – share with orientation and advising offices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Planning &amp; Coordination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sum 2013 & Beyond | • Final budget planning  
• Preparations for orientations and semester opening weeks |

**Implementation**

• Revise instruction, implementation processes based on assessment data.

**Assessment**

• Assess current semester learning outcomes (with longitudinal comparison).

**Professional Development**

• Review/revise training based on assessment data.  
• Implement online repository.  
• Best Start Certification training for instructors and advisors – late Summer.  
• Plan Fall semester renewal training activities.

**Communications**

• Share Best Start marketing materials with orientation, instruction, and advising offices.
D. Resources

Resources for the QEP implementation consist of directly budgeted activities and in-kind resources from various existing operational areas and personnel. Support for the implementation will be provided through the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Student Success, the offices of Research and Institutional Effectiveness, Technology Services, Professional Development, Marketing and Communications, and other system services.

The college has set aside $700,000 in FY 2012 to support additional faculty to teach the expanded number of sections of EDUC 1300 that will be needed to support the projected increased enrollment as a result of the administrative decision to require participation by certain identified first-time-in-college students.

Resources to directly support the QEP’s “Best Start” operations are listed in the table on the following page.
### Table 3.2: QEP Budget for Best Start Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>System Leadership, Planning, &amp; Coordination</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Start Faculty Fellow ($72K) and clerical support ($28K)</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office supplies, in-district travel, etc.</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Implementation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair, Best Start Implementation Team (6 college locations)</td>
<td>$84,000</td>
<td>$84,000</td>
<td>$84,000</td>
<td>$84,000</td>
<td>$84,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- stipend for logistical support ($14K/college)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- part time Coordinator I equivalent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory Form B &amp; Mid-Year Student Assessment</td>
<td>$23,089</td>
<td>$71,639</td>
<td>$77,362</td>
<td>$81,424</td>
<td>$85,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel-Levitz Annual Statistical Analysis &amp; On-site Review of Implementation</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair, Best Start Assessment Subcommittee</td>
<td>$3,630</td>
<td>$3,630</td>
<td>$3,630</td>
<td>$3,630</td>
<td>$3,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Faculty Program Coordinator - 1 Release/Stipend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Best Start Academy, Symposium, certifications, adjunct stipends, Noel-Levitz training, etc.</td>
<td>$62,540</td>
<td>$83,130</td>
<td>$83,130</td>
<td>$83,130</td>
<td>$83,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- First-Year Experience Conference (admin. &amp; chairs)</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Noel-Levitz Conference (admin. &amp; chairs)</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Communications</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional information and materials</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Cost:</strong></td>
<td>$340,259</td>
<td>$392,399</td>
<td>$397,622</td>
<td>$401,684</td>
<td>$405,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Year Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,937,527</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. Development and Implementation of Best Start

Specific personnel and committees at the system and campus level will be established and charged with responsibility for the five major organizational processes of the Best Start program: planning & coordination, implementation, assessment, professional development, and communications. Other existing offices and service areas will provide support for developing and implementing the processes.

A. Organizational Structure

The Best Start organizational structure represents a holistic and collaborative effort by academic affairs and student services offices. It will consist of three functional units – a steering committee and two subcommittees – each having a primary role for one or more of the five organizational processes while supporting all five processes in a secondary role. (see Figure 4.1 below)

![Figure 4.1: Best Start Organizational Structure](image)

The following existing functional areas will provide support and guidance for the Best Start functional units, as needed:

- Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Student Success (supervision)
- Council for Academic and Student Affairs (CASA)
• Marketing and Communications
• Professional Development
• Academic Planning and Assessment
• Technology Services
• EDUC 1300 Curriculum Team and liaison
• Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness
• College administrative, academic and student support areas

B. Committees

The three functional units supporting Best Start will consist of the following steering committee, two subcommittees, and members (see Figure 4.2 below):

• Best Start Steering Committee (system)
  o Best Start Assessment Subcommittee (system)
  o Best Start Campus Implementation Teams (6)

Figure 4.2: Best Start Committees

Descriptions for each committee, subcommittee, or team are listed below, including leadership, membership and main functional roles.
**Best Start Steering Committee (system)**

Functions:
- Serve as the steering committee for the Best Start program.
- Primary overall responsibility for the program.
- Develop and recommend standards of practice for Best Start.
- Assist in the evaluation of Best Start activities and recommend changes to improve activities and outcomes.
- Review and recommend support services provided to faculty, staff, and students participating in Best Start initiatives.
- Develop professional development activities and other needed resources (based on assessment data).
- Monitor compliance with, and ensure accountability for assessment-related requirements of the QEP.
- Facilitate and provide leadership for effective college-wide evaluation of QEP assessment processes.

Recommendations:
- forward to Council for Academic and Student Affairs (CASA)

Chair:
- Best Start Faculty Fellow (faculty selected by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Student Success)

Members:
- Best Start Faculty Fellow
- Campus Best Start Implementation Team Chairs (6)
- Chair of Best Start Assessment Subcommittee
- Faculty membership, to include:
  - a senior counselor, nominated by peers
  - a senior advisor, nominated by peers
  - faculty who participate in Best Start activities, nominated by the Faculty Senate at each college.

**Best Start Campus Implementation Teams (campus subcommittee, 6)**

Functions:
- Serve as the operating and planning subcommittee for the Best Start program at the campus.
- Coordinate collaborative operations among campus stakeholders from Academic Affairs and Student Services.
- Support the various other functions of the Best Start Steering Committee at the campus level.

Operational Recommendations:
- forward to campus leaders, per local guidelines

Programmatic Recommendations:
- forward to the Best Start Steering Committee

Chair:
- selected by campus leadership

Members:
- Chair
- Faculty membership, to include:
  - senior counselor or advisor (2), nominated by peers
  - EDUC 1300 faculty (2), nominated by the Faculty Senate
• Student representatives (prior Best Start participants, tutors, orientation leaders, ambassadors, etc.)
• Other members of the committee might include leaders or staff from the following support areas (per campus option):
  o Academic Dean
  o Student Services Dean
  o Student Life
  o Learning Centers/Tutoring
  o Early Intervention
  o Orientations
  o Library
  o Professional Development

**Best Start Assessment Subcommittee (system)**

**Functions:**
• Serve as the operating and planning subcommittee for Best Start assessment processes.
• Coordinate semester and annual assessment activities.
• Liaison to external assessment consultant.
• Compile and report assessment data.
• Recommend revisions to instructional activities in response to assessment data.
• Recommend revisions to implementation processes and/or support services provided to faculty, staff, and students participating in Best Start initiatives.
• Recommend revisions to professional development activities and/or other needed resources.
• Support the various other functions of the Best Start Steering Committee.

**Operational Recommendations:**
• forward to the Best Start Steering Committee

**Programmatic Recommendations:**
• forward to the Best Start Steering Committee

**Chair:**
• Faculty Chair (faculty selected by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Student Success)

**Members:**
• Chair
• Faculty (12) members, 2 from each college, to include:
  o senior counselor or advisor (1), nominated by peers
  o EDUC 1300 faculty (1), nominated by the Faculty Senate
B. Personnel

Personnel will be identified to lead and support the above committees. Two of the supporting positions are new full-time positions and two will be part-time assignments. The new positions will be filled by assignment to current employees and funds for the positions are included in the QEP budget for the Best Start program:

- Best Start Faculty Fellow (*new, full-time, Chair for Steering Committee*)
- Chair (6), Best Start Campus Implementation Team (*part-time admin. assignment at each campus*)
- Best Start Campus Coordinator I (*6 new, part-time positions*)
- Faculty Chair, Best Start Assessment Subcommittee (*assignment*)

**Best Start Faculty Fellow**

The Faculty Fellow will be a new position and will be responsible for the following broad functions:

- Programmatic leadership, coordination, planning, and budget for Best Start
- Facilitation for communication and collaboration
- Support for the Best Start implementation framework
- Training: development, scheduling, coordination, and delivery
- Monitoring of employee certification status for continued participation in Best Start program
- Best Start assessment and evaluation data dissemination

**Chair, Best Start Campus Implementation Team (6)**

The Chair for each implementation team will be selected from among current staff at each college and will be responsible for the following broad functions:

- College campus leadership and operational coordination
- Local communication and collaboration
- Member of Best Start Steering Committee
- Liaison for Noel-Levitz web data portal and assessment logistics
- Scheduling of Best Start activities, promotional events, etc.
- Input and participation for developing training
- Facilitation of local training options
- Identification of staff and faculty for training and certification
- Monitoring certification status for continued participation

**Best Start Campus Coordinator I (6, part-time)**

To assist the Chairs of Best Start Campus Implementation Teams, a new part time position will be established to provide support for coordination and logistics associated with the functions of the Campus Chair and Implementation Team, such as:

- Scheduling, maintenance, communications, equipment, work flows, and supplies
- Meeting minutes, reports, and other correspondence.
• External and internal assessment activity logistics
• Maintenance of faculty and staff training and certification status

**Faculty Chair, Best Start Assessment Subcommittee**

The Faculty Chair for the assessment subcommittee will be selected from existing faculty, will receive one 48-hour “program coordinator” release or stipend per long semester, and will be responsible for the following functions:

• Best Start assessment data collection and dissemination
• Coordination of logistics to collect random samples of student submissions for inclusion in assessment activities
• Liaison for annual and monthly analysis and review meetings with external assessment partner
• Scheduling of assessment activities
• Compile and report assessment data.
• Member of Best Start Steering Committee
• Compile and communicate committee recommendations for revisions to instructional activities, professional development, and implementation processes and/or support services.
• Input and participation for developing training
V. Assessment

An assessment plan has been developed and will be implemented to measure the college system’s success in improving the learning environment as well as student achievement of the two learning outcomes. The Best Start assessment plan includes an annual assessment and evaluation cycle and incorporates various methodologies and instruments, such as quantitative and qualitative, direct and indirect, and formative and summative methods.

External assessment resources will be provided through Noel-Levitz and the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE). The Noel-Levitz Retention Management System Plus includes external training, the use of motivational pre- and post-assessments for each student participating in the Best Start program, as well as an annual external site visit for a formative Best Start implementation review and summative student statistical analysis to assist in predictive modeling for Best Start implementation strategies. The Center for Community College Student Engagement provides two student surveys that will be used as indirect assessments for the Best Start program.

Assessment of the Best Start program involves multiple offices of the college. The Best Start Faculty Fellow, the Director of Academic Planning and Assessment, the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Student Success, and the Best Start Assessment Subcommittee share responsibility for various assessment activities. The Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness will provide supporting summative data from the college Electronic Resource Planning system (a Peoplesoft implementation known locally as “iStar”). Faculty, advisors, Best Start Implementation Team chairs, campus Best Start part time coordinators, and other members from the campus Best Start Implementation Teams will provide formative assessment data and logistical assistance as needed.
Assessment and Improvement Model:

The assessment plan includes various assessment methods for the Best Start implementation, student learning outcomes, and institutional goals. Figure 5.1 below illustrates the iterative improvement process resulting from the assessment plan, by which stakeholders in the Best Start Steering Committee, Campus Implementation Teams, and Assessment Subcommittee communicate and collaborate to revise and improve the Best Start program for students.

---

Figure 5.1: Best Start Improvement Model
Annual Assessment Cycle

The Best Start Faculty Fellow is responsible for the overall assessment plan and annual cycle of activities. The Director of Academic Planning and Assessment will provide expertise and oversight for the assessment activities and methodology. The Best Start Assessment Subcommittee will conduct the learning outcomes assessment activities under the direction of the Best Start Faculty Fellow who is responsible for insuring the assessment activities are scheduled according to the plan. A faculty member will serve as chair of the Best Start Assessment Subcommittee. The committee will include two representatives among faculty and advisors from each college campus.

Results of assessment findings will be shared with stakeholders and leaders according to the annual cycle detailed in Table 5.1 (below). Reporting will be accomplished through meetings, compiled reports, and electronic communications. Results of assessments and evaluations will be used to revise implementation processes, classroom activities and lesson designs, training, etc. (see additional tables below).

Following the initial pilot activities, the assessment, reporting, evaluation, and planning activities will follow the annual cycle listed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Annual Assessment Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sem.</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Assess completion, retention, success (Fall - Fall).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Learning Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Current semester learning outcomes (with longitudinal comparison).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Implementation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Annual external analytics and implementation review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Best Start data report to leadership, Deans, faculty, student services, Best Start campus teams, external reviewer, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Assess rubrics, training, lessons via focus groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Revise lessons, training, implementation processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Assess completion, retention, and success (Fall - Spring).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Learning Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Current semester learning outcomes (with longitudinal comparison).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Implementation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Best Start data report to college community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Evaluation report for Best Start program based on prior assessments, external reviews, focus groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Budget and program proposals based on evaluation report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learning Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Current semester learning outcomes (with longitudinal comparison).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Implementation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Revise lessons, training, implementation processes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment of QEP Institutional Goals for Best Start:

- Increase by 5% the number of FTIC students participating in Best Start who successfully complete (with grade of C or better) their current enrolled courses.
- Increase by 5% the semester-to-semester retention of FTIC students participating in Best Start.

The above institutional goals for the QEP will be assessed via the activities detailed in Table 5.2 below, beginning with a target of 3% improvement over a baseline of prior observed results, and gradually adjusting to a 5% increase from the baseline.

Table 5.2: Institutional Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Assess. Method</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Steward</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Use of Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current semester student completion</td>
<td>iStar data from ORIE</td>
<td>after semester</td>
<td>Faculty Fellow and ORIE</td>
<td>establish baseline; compare trend to all FTIC</td>
<td>+3% - 2012</td>
<td>programmatic planning and changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current semester student success (avg. GPA ≥ 2.0)</td>
<td>iStar data from ORIE</td>
<td>after semester</td>
<td>Faculty Fellow and ORIE</td>
<td>establish baseline; compare trend to all FTIC</td>
<td>+3% - 2012</td>
<td>programmatic planning and changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall–Spring Best Start student retention</td>
<td>iStar data from ORIE</td>
<td>annually (Spring)</td>
<td>Faculty Fellow and ORIE</td>
<td>establish baseline; compare trend to all FTIC</td>
<td>+3% - 2012</td>
<td>programmatic planning and changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall–Fall Best Start student retention</td>
<td>iStar data from ORIE</td>
<td>annually (Fall)</td>
<td>Faculty Fellow and ORIE</td>
<td>establish baseline; compare trend to all FTIC</td>
<td>+3% - 2012</td>
<td>programmatic planning and changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: FTIC – first-time-in-college student; iStar – Lone Star’s Electronic Resource Planning system (Peoplesoft); ORIE – Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness
**Assessment of Learning Outcome #1:**

Outcome #1:  Students will clarify an educational goal and learning plan.

Supporting activities and assessments:

a.  As a result of participating in the career exploration activity, Part I, students in EDUC 1300 will be able to identify with 100% competency their intended career path as demonstrated by writing a research paper.

b.  As a result of participating in the degree planning activity, Part II, 100% of students will be able to confirm a major or program of study and list 12 courses on a degree planning form.

c.  As a result of participating in the degree planning activity, Parts III and IV, 100% of students will be able to confirm their major or program of study and post their required courses in their online *My Planner* form in iStar.

The above learning outcome and supporting activities will be assessed using the measures outlined below in Table 5.3. Materials for a working model of the activities can be found at: [http://www.LoneStar.edu/QEP](http://www.LoneStar.edu/QEP).

**Table 5.3: Assessment for Learning Outcome #1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Assess. Method</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Steward</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Use of Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) career exploration assignment</td>
<td>research paper</td>
<td>mid-semester</td>
<td>BSAS Chair and APA Director</td>
<td>Lone Star scoring rubric for sample of 100 papers</td>
<td>• 80% competent Spring 2012 • increase 5%/yr. to 100% by Fall 2016</td>
<td>training and curriculum changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) degree planning assignment</td>
<td>degree plan with identified courses</td>
<td>mid-semester</td>
<td>BSAS Chair and APA Director</td>
<td>Lone Star scoring rubric for 100 samples</td>
<td>• 80% completion Spring 2012 • increase 5%/yr. to 100% by Fall 2016 • avg. 12 courses included in degree plan</td>
<td>training and curriculum changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Assess. Method</td>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>Steward</td>
<td>Metrics</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Use of Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (c) confirm major/plan and post courses assignment | iStar data | end of semester | Faculty Fellow and ORIE | major/program identified (y/n) and # of courses in My Planner | • 80% completion Spring 2012  
• increase 5%/yr. to 100% by Fall 2016  
• avg. 12 courses included in degree plan | training and curriculum changes |

*Note: APA – Office of Academic Planning and Assessment; BSAS – Best Start Assessment Subcommittee; CSI – College Student Inventory; ORIE – Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness*
Assessment of Learning Outcome #2:

Outcome #2: Students will identify and address a barrier to their academic success.

Supporting activities and assessments:

a. As a result of completing the Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory (CSI), Part I, students in EDUC 1300 will identify with 100% competency a barrier to their success.

b. As a result of participating in the “path to success” activity, Part II, students in EDUC 1300 will develop with 100% competency a plan for addressing their barrier, as demonstrated by writing a paper.

Assessment for the learning outcome and activities is outlined in Table 5.4. Materials for a working model of the activities can be found at: [http://www.LoneStar.edu/QEP](http://www.LoneStar.edu/QEP).

Table 5.4: Assessment for Learning Outcome #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Assess. Method</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Steward</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Use of Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Noel-Levitz CSI</td>
<td>external instrument</td>
<td>beginning of semester</td>
<td>instructor or mentor</td>
<td>individual indicators from CSI student report</td>
<td>identify strengths and barriers</td>
<td>student info resource for assignment (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) path to success assignment</td>
<td>path to success paper</td>
<td>end of semester</td>
<td>BSAS Chair and APA Director</td>
<td>Lone Star scoring rubric for sample of 100 papers</td>
<td>• 80% competent Spring 2012&lt;br&gt;• increase 5%/yr. to 100% by Fall 2016</td>
<td>training and curriculum changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: APA – Office of Academic Planning and Assessment; BSAS – Best Start Assessment Subcommittee; CSI – College Student Inventory; ORIE – Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness
**Assessment of Best Start Implementation**

The assessment plan for implementation of the Best Start program includes a process and timeline using both internal and external measures. Results of the assessment process will be communicated to various stakeholders and will be utilized for evaluation and revision, where needed, of Best Start program components: training, curriculum, instruction, student learning, logistical processes, academic support, etc. Assessment of the implementation is outlined in Table 5.5 below.

**Table 5.5: Implementation Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Assess. Method</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Steward</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Use of Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noel-Levizt CSI</td>
<td>external instrument</td>
<td>mid-semester</td>
<td>BSAS Chair and APA Director</td>
<td>aggregate indicators from CSI coordinator report</td>
<td>identify top issues and trends prior to Best Start activities</td>
<td>college applies insights in college support areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel-Levizt MYSA</td>
<td>external instrument</td>
<td>end of semester</td>
<td>BSAS Chair and APA Director</td>
<td>aggregate indicators from MYSA coordinator report</td>
<td>identify shift in issues and trends following the Best Start activities</td>
<td>training and curriculum changes; apply insights in support areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>focus groups, evaluation forms</td>
<td>Annually (Fall)</td>
<td>Faculty Fellow</td>
<td>qualitative data</td>
<td>correlation to student assessment data</td>
<td>revise lessons, training, processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assess learning outcome rubrics, lesson design, training</td>
<td>focus groups, evaluation forms</td>
<td>Annually (Fall)</td>
<td>Faculty Fellow</td>
<td>qualitative data</td>
<td>correlation to student assessment data</td>
<td>revise lessons, training, processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSSE</td>
<td>Indirect, random external survey</td>
<td>2013, 2015</td>
<td>VCAASS</td>
<td>survey items: 4m, 4q, 9b, 9d, 9e, 9f, 12j, 12n, 12o, 13, 17, 20, 21, 26, 27</td>
<td>compare gains from prior surveys</td>
<td>Best Start program revisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENSE</td>
<td>indirect, random ext. survey</td>
<td>2013, 2015</td>
<td>VCAASS</td>
<td>survey items: 4, 18, 20, 21</td>
<td>gains from prior surveys</td>
<td>Best Start program revisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: BSAS – Best Start Assessment Subcommittee; CCSSE – Community College Survey of Student Engagement; CSI – College Student Inventory; MYSA – Mid-Year Student Assessment; SENSE – Survey of Entering Student Engagement; VCAASS – Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Student Success*
Summary

The QEP assessment plan includes various assessment methods for the Best Start QEP institutional goals, student learning outcomes, and implementation. Through the iterative process resulting from the assessment plan, the stakeholders in the Best Start Steering Committee, Campus Implementation Teams, and Assessment Subcommittee communicate and collaborate to assess, revise, and improve the Best Start program for students.
References


Chancellor’s Ad Hoc Committee on Student Success. (2011a). Proposals to the chancellor. The Woodlands, TX: Lone Star College System.

Chancellor’s Ad Hoc Committee on Student Success. (2011b). What we believe about student success. The Woodlands, TX: Lone Star College System.


Other documents can be found at: http://www.LoneStar.edu/QEP.