**QEP Update**  
**Feb 2011**

## Best Start: The LSC First Year Experience

**The First Time is the Best Time**

Our first interactions and experiences with entering college students will maximize their potential for student success, build proper expectations, and make the first year the best year.

### QEP Initiatives (dual-focus):

1. Develop a **Best Start Academy** for first year students, including a reading experience.
2. Develop a **First Year Experience Institute** (FYEI) for employees supporting orientation, EDUC 1300, and advising.

The Quality Enhancement Plan comprises two initiatives to improve student success in the first year. The initiatives will:

- build upon our prior and current efforts devoted to the first year experience (FYE)
- strengthen relationships with and among our students
- increase faculty involvement
- improve learning
- support first-year learning outcomes
- enrich the college experience
- better prepare entering students for college

### FYE as a “Program” focuses on ...

- Program-level Student Learning Outcomes
  - Student Learning Outcomes for each activity
  - Student Behaviors, Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge
  - Faculty Behaviors, Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge
  - Student Goals and Expectations
  - Connections, Relationships

### Foundations of Excellence – a holistic framework

#### Potential Timeline:

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<td>FYE Council</td>
<td>FoE Self Studies</td>
<td>Develop FYE SLOs</td>
<td>Initiate System-wide efforts, assessments</td>
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Strategies for Implementation:

- **Align and map learning outcomes** for the Best Start Academy, EDUC 1300 course, advising, etc.
- Foster a **student success culture** through the FYE institute training.
- Support a holistic approach for the FYE by establishing a **First Year Experience Council** and campus teams (including students, faculty, curriculum teams, and co-curricular staff) to support a collaborative approach toward planning, nurturing, and assessing the learning outcomes associated with each student’s first year experience.
- As part of the college system’s strategic plan, implement a system-wide **Foundations of Excellence Self-Study** via campus and system FYE Councils, resulting in the development and execution of separate strategic FYE implementation and improvement plans for each campus and the college system to ensure the continuous improvement and sustainability for the first year experience.

Background Information:

*Key Elements for the First Year Experience at LSC*

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* internal review with consultant

Objectives for FYE

In a review of colleges focusing on the first year experience, we observed that their efforts typically focused on the following research-based 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;
- Assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for college. (p. 14)
Best Practices

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;
- Peer mentors and leaders;
- Ritual and ceremony (convocation) for arriving students;
- Efforts to build enthusiasm for the institution as students arrive;
- Connection built through long-term mentoring relationship with each student;
- **True academic advising**;
- Targeted advising;
- **Faculty advising**;
- 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;
- Encouraging full-time enrollment whenever feasible.

Summary

The Lone Star College System has implemented a number of initiatives that address many of the above-listed elements. Through the Achieving the Dream initiative we implemented early intervention and the Advisor II program for first time in college (FTIC) students placed into EDUC 1300 courses. We will implement mandatory orientation and EDUC 1300 attendance for the Fall 2011 semester for a specifically identified student population testing into two higher-level developmental courses (a human development course will be required for students placing into lower level developmental courses). Orientation and EDUC 1300 will be required in Spring 2012 for FTIC students who place into one or more top-level developmental course.

The QEP Development Committee identified the development of two QEP initiatives as additions to the LSC first year experience. The QEP activities and strategies will foster a holistic approach for the FYE, focus on learning outcomes, and support stronger connections among students, faculty, support staff, and the community to improve student learning and success.
Fall 2010 QEP Committee Membership:

CyFair:  
Botkin, Rose  Librarian  
Lewis, Ted  Dean  
Osbourn, Peggy  Counselor  
Phillips, Claire  Dean  
Van Wie, Victoria  Psychology  

Kingwood:  
Adkins, Kathleen  Advising/Counseling  
Riley, Rebecca  VP, Academic Affairs  
Stubbs, Brenda  EDUC 1300  
Terry, Janis  Learning Center Mgr.  

Montgomery:  
Brandes, Nathalie  Geology  
Kainer, Daniel  Biology  
Peyton, Janice  Library Dir  
Stallings, Yvonne  Math  
Williams, Wendell  (alternate) VP, Student Success  

North Harris:  
Gant, Angela  Dev. Studies  
Lowe, Rachael  Counselor  
McFarland, Michael  SEA Center  
Puller, David  Librarian  
Thornton, Sue  Business  

Tomball:  
Carstens, Ryan  Dean  
Tsoi, Gerry  Technology  
Waters, Waters  Extended Learning Ctr  

Sys Off:  
Miner, Karen  AtD  
Rockefeller, Debra  Compliance/Assess.  

Community:  
Johnson, Jadi  Community member
Insights from 15 Campus Focus Groups (Fall 2010)

Introduction:

With the help of our dedicated QEP Development Committee members, fifteen focus group discussions were conducted at the five campuses with students, faculty/staff, or community members. Insights from the focus group meetings assisted the committee in identifying a specific topic and initiative within the QEP theme, “First Year Experience,” as well as specific strategies to implement.

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 good and caring Lone Star faculty and staff. So, our focus for the QEP will be to transform our processes and culture to nurture a first year experience that feels more like the “best time.”

Insights:

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.

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.

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. 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.

**Goals:**

Generally, students don't 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.

**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.

**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 gaining 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, the EDUC 1300 course, etc.

**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.
**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. It’s importance can not 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.

**Access:**

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.

**Communicate & Collaborate:**

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.
Insights from Practitioners (Nov 16 workshop)

Introduction:

The Lone Star College System has implemented various initiatives to improve student success. A group of practitioners and leaders from across the district were convened to share insights concerning our current and past practices. Below is a synopsis of trends and insights observed from the discussions with practitioners and leaders that informed our QEP planning efforts.

Insights:

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 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 Achieving the Dream 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.
Next Steps

Identify Stakeholders

- Student Ambassadors and Leaders
- EDUC 1300 curriculum team
- EDUC 1300 Faculty, Deans
- Faculty teaching key freshman courses (high enrollment, high DFWI)
- Faculty in Developmental Education
- Instructional Outcomes Committee
- Student Services
- Student Life Coordinators
- Orientation Coordinators

Identify Learning Outcomes

- Leadership from faculty, also including stakeholders, Early 2011

Develop Action Steps

With administrative approval for the proposed focus of effort, the QEP Development Committee will identify specific action items, activities, anticipated resources, learning outcomes, and assessment strategies for the QEP. This will involve the following types of activities:

- literature review focused specifically on the selected activities of the focused topic;
- identify academic, student services, technology, and research stakeholders and initiate collaborative discussions with appropriate departments and councils regarding the proposed action items;
- further review of comparable practices at other institutions;
- with Instructional Outcomes Committee, clarify assessment methodology and metrics;
- conduct focus group meetings with students, faculty, and staff to obtain feedback on the QEP and further refine the approach and activities;
- review and identify possible policy, organizational, and resource issues and needs;
- submit first draft of the QEP early Spring to SACS Steering Committee for review.

Develop First Draft of Implementation

- Target, early Spring 2011

References
