

March 4, 2008

THE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN

**Copy will be included
in the Future Revised
*Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation***

2007

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The Quality Enhancement Plan

I. Overview

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is the component of the accreditation process that reflects and affirms the commitment of the Commission on Colleges to the enhancement of the quality of higher education and to the proposition that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. By definition, the QEP describes a carefully designed course of action that addresses a well-defined and focused topic or issue related to enhancing student learning. The QEP should be embedded within the institution's ongoing integrated institution-wide planning and evaluation process and may very well evolve from this existing process or from other processes related to the institution's internal reaffirmation review.

Developing a QEP as a part of the reaffirmation process is an opportunity for the institution to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue or issues the institution considers important to improving student learning. Responding to this reaffirmation requirement may also provide an impetus for focusing critical and creative energy. Institutions report that the QEP "has caused us to become much more intentional and focused about an important element of our mission" and "helped us put in motion our creativity."

Institutional Feedback:

"The deadline and requirement for developing a QEP as part of our SACS reaffirmation served as a crucial motivator in translating vision into reality. We are much farther along our chosen path than we would be otherwise." (Level IV institution, Class of 2005)

Institutional Feedback:

"For achieving the focus, it lends us the benefit of having made a promise to an external body that has a firm deadline." (Level III institution, Class of 2006)

While the Compliance Certification focuses on the past and the present, the QEP looks to the future. Core Requirement 2.12 requires an institution to develop a plan for increasing the effectiveness of some aspect of its educational program relating to student learning.

Core Requirement 2.12: The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4)

includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.

This requirement launches a process that can move an institution into a future characterized by the development and/or modification of creative, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences for students.

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution provided a comprehensive and clear analysis of the crucial importance of the QEP for improving the learning environment?

Student Learning Defined. Within the context of the QEP as a requirement for reaffirmation, the Commission on Colleges broadly defines student learning as changes in

- knowledge,
- skills,
- behaviors,
- or values.

Within the context of their own particular Quality Enhancement Plans, member institutions must specify realistic, measurable student learning outcomes appropriate for their focused topic. Peer evaluators do not hesitate to write recommendations demanding that institutions “provide clearly defined student learning outcomes that lead to observable results.”

Institutional Support

The development of a QEP that successfully addresses the quality of student learning requires a significant commitment from the institutional community. Recently reaffirmed institutions note that they wish that they had realized earlier just how many people need to be involved in the development and implementation of their QEPs and the hours involved in connecting with people.

An institution's support of the Quality Enhancement Plan should be evident through:

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

Institutional Feedback:

“The process of developing the plan has fostered an atmosphere of camaraderie, collaboration, and creative problem solving that continues during the project implementation.” (Level I institution, Class of 2005)

- Broad-based institutional participation of all appropriate campus constituencies in the identification of the topic or issue to be addressed by the QEP

Institutional Feedback:

“It has also been a good opportunity to involve faculty collectively on a project that has a direct impact on student learning.” (Level I institution, Class of 2005)

“The development of the project was a bottom-up process. That is, a committee of faculty, staff, and students identified several possible areas of focus, based in part on a survey of various stakeholder groups. Then the final choices were submitted again for evaluation by the stakeholders. This process helped to establish a strong basis of support for our project.” Level VI institution, Class of 2005)

- Careful review of research and best practices related to the topic or issue

Institutional Feedback:

“Additional research regarding the new technology which is available and discussions with personnel from other colleges which have similar programs could have assisted with determining the weaknesses involved with the original QEP.” (Level I institution, Class of 2006)

- Allocation of adequate human and financial resources to develop, implement, and sustain the QEP.

Institutional Feedback:

“The time commitment! More financial support should have been built into the budget for learning communities and assessment efforts. In addition, employment of a full-time ‘director’ to manage and facilitate the process of plan development and the actual product would be advisable. (Level I institution, Class of 2006)

- Implementation strategies that include a clear timeline and assignment of responsibilities.

Institutional Feedback:

“I wish we had had a clearer idea about the support resources necessary to sustain the project for the duration (staff infrastructure).” (Level V institution, Class of 2005)

- A structure established for evaluating the extent to which the goals set for the plan are attained.

Institutional Feedback:

“The college wishes it had fully appreciated the high level of assessment that would be required to make the QEP effective.” (Level II institution, Class of 2005)

Peer review committees expect an institution to demonstrate its commitment to the QEP by providing a realistic operational plan for implementing, maintaining, and completing the project.

II. Developing the QEP

Processes for developing the QEP will differ among institutions, depending on such factors as size, campus culture, internal governance structures, mission, the focus of the QEP, physical and human resources, and numerous other variables that may determine what is appropriate or even possible. These same factors affect the length of time necessary to develop the plan for on-site review. Institutions need to build into their development process sufficient time for extensive investigation, discussion, and refinement of the topic as well as time for drafts to be circulated, debated, and revised in ways that continue to gather and build support for the QEP. While peer evaluators recognize the role that institutional culture plays in shaping the development process, they do expect the process to have been methodical, logical, and inclusive.

Developing a QEP is a recursive rather than a linear process, much like any other important, deliberative, and reflective planning and writing. An institution should expect the focus and framework for the QEP to shift and evolve as the research, writing, talking, and campus participation occur. Over time, the focus will become sharper, the outline more certain, and the goals better defined. This consideration and reconsideration are instrumental in the development of greater confidence in the QEP. In fact, a substantial amount of ambiguity is to be expected during the creative phase of the development process.

Leadership. The institution’s Leadership Team is charged with providing oversight for both the Compliance Review and the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan. After the institution has identified the topic or issue, the Leadership Team may wish to assign the day-to-day responsibility for its development to a select group representing those individuals who have the greatest knowledge about and interest in the ideas, content, processes, and methodologies to be developed in the QEP along with expertise in planning and assessment and in managing and allocating institutional resources. Since the QEP addresses enhancing student learning and/or the environment supporting student learning, faculty typically play a primary role in this phase of the reaffirmation process.

Many institutions charge a QEP Steering Committee with the task of drafting a document for review. Steering Committees frequently establish sub-committees that focus on particular aspects of the development process; for example, one group might conduct the literature review, another flesh out the strategies for professional development, a third

develop the assessment plan, a fourth detail the budget, and yet another work on a marketing plan.

Institutional Feedback

We wish we had had a clearer understanding of the scope and magnitude of developing the plan. We would advise institutions to allow themselves a great deal of time in selecting a topic, developing the plan, etc. We do feel that we came up with an excellent QEP; however, we would have appreciated the opportunity to have spent more time having a thoughtful dialogue about the process. (Level IV institution, Class of 2006)

- **Step One: Selecting the Topic**

One way to begin the process of selecting the QEP topic is to explain the nature and purpose of the QEP to members of the institutional community. Before institutional constituents can be expected to support the development and implementation of the QEP, they must understand what it is, how it relates to other accreditation requirements, and what impact it can have on the future of the institution and its students. Some institutions tap the expertise of their public relations office in finding creative ways to get the message out; other tap the ingenuity of their faculty in establishing avenues for educating the internal community. WebPages, rallies, contests -- institutions need to identify the vehicles that will work within their campus culture.

Institutional Feedback

“Institutions should be advised...to develop well-planned communications campaigns about the QEP. Media relations offices could play a direct partnering [role].” (Level V institution, Class of 2005)

Some institutions do some initial exploration and research that engages a limited number of faculty, administrators, and students about the topics for the QEP before involving the larger campus community. Others engage a wide cross-section of the institution’s constituents to discuss potential topics and then convene a smaller working group to determine the more focused topic(s). Institutions need to identify a process that harmonizes with their size and governance structure. Whatever the process used for selecting the topic for the QEP, one of the Commission’s primary concerns is that the institution ensure widespread participation by all pertinent institutional constituent groups – faculty, administrators, students, and perhaps even alumni and trustees. When broad-based involvement is not self-evident, on-site evaluators encourage expanded involvement in the QEP through recommendations, such as the following: “The Committee recommends that the College expand the QEP [Leadership] Team to involve other constituent groups (such as student support services, adjunct faculty, students, program advisory groups, and/or academic support services)....”

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution demonstrated that various institutional constituencies have been involved in the identification of the topic for the QEP?

Since faculty members shoulder responsibility for student learning, they should be appropriately represented in the early phases of the development of the QEP. When On-Site Review Committees see less faculty involvement than expected, they are apt to write a recommendation calling for the involvement of faculty “in all decisions regarding the implementation of the QEP, including but not limited to the types of training needed [and] identification and selection of learning technologies and classroom equipment.” Faculty members, in particular, need to agree that the issues identified for the QEP are sufficiently significant to engage individuals in implementation and follow-through, not only for enhancing student learning and/or the environment for supporting student learning on an institutional level but also for engaging the long-term commitment of faculty and other individuals on whom the implementation and continuation of the plan will depend.

Sources of Inspiration. Since Core Requirement 2.12 demands “a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment,” an exploration of the institution’s culture, strategic planning, goals, mission, and assessment results is a good place to begin the search for an appropriate topic. Tapping into issues centered on student learning where shared interests, concerns, and aspirations have already surfaced or where data have already been collected and analyzed may prove fruitful.

Consider that the topic for the QEP need not be a brand new idea. For example, an institution might develop a QEP that extends, modifies, redirects, or strengthens an improvement that is already underway. An institution might also develop a QEP that has been in the planning stages prior to the beginning of preparations for reaffirmation. An institution may not, however, submit a QEP that describes initiatives that are fully realized.

Institutions are encouraged to base their selection of the topic for the QEP on empirical data and an analysis of these data. The institution may wish to examine studies that have been done on best practices in higher education and other national and peer group data derived from carefully designed research. A QEP topic based on a needs assessment, for example, will have more validity and credibility than one that does not. Not only will recognized, substantive issues likely have a good chance of getting the institution’s stakeholders to support both the development and implementation of the plan, but they may also protect the institution from receiving a recommendation calling for clearer description of “the current status of the programs that are cited to be improved in order to better identify the need for the initiative. Data such as attendance figures, survey feedback, student satisfaction and nationally standardized measures are examples of information that can be used to justify the need for improvement.”

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Does the topic link to the institution's mission/vision? How does it fit into the institution's strategic plan?

Whatever the source of inspiration, institutions should ensure that the QEP clearly establishes the importance of the topic so that peer evaluators can understand its value and appropriateness to the institution. The On-Site Review Committee will expect the institution to have selected an issue of substance and depth.

Scope. A critical factor in the selection of the topic is the determination of the scope of the initiative. While the QEP is not expected to touch the life of every student at the institution, the topic does need to be sufficiently broad to be viewed as significant to the institution and as a major enhancement to student learning. On the other hand, it also needs to be focused enough to provide a manageable framework for development and implementation.

Institutional Feedback

*"The College was so focused on including every office and program on campus in the planning and implementation of the QEP that our original QEP was far too broad and complicated."
(Level 1 institution, Class of 2006)*

Institutional Feedback

*"Keep it small! We wanted to solve all of our problems with one project, and that simply isn't possible."
(Level 1 institution, Class of 2005)*

On the other hand, one might argue that an institution has the right to select a broad, complex issue for its QEP, and certainly it does. Doing so, however, demands that extra care be taken in demonstrating to the peer reviewers the institution's capacity for implementing and sustaining the initiative. If the institution fails to present a clear and convincing picture of its capability to follow-through, then it may find itself responding to recommendations such as these:

"The Committee recommends that the institution further prioritize the...initiatives. ...in the Committee's professional judgment, the focus should be narrowed and sharpened."

"The Committee recommends that the institution re-evaluate the spectrum of the stated goals and omit any goals not directly related to student outcomes."

"The Committee recommends that the institution narrow and refine the focus...."

Successful QEP topics skillfully balance significance and institutional capacity and stem from a realistic assessment of what the institution can afford and what the institution can expect to achieve in the time allotted.

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution provided a clear and concise description of the critical issue(s) to be addressed?

Viable QEP topics include, but are not limited to, enhancing the academic climate for student learning, strengthening the general studies curriculum, developing creative approaches to experiential learning, enhancing critical thinking skills, introducing innovative teaching and learning strategies, increasing student engagement in learning, and exploring imaginative ways to use technology in the curriculum. In all cases, goals and evaluation strategies must be clearly and directly linked to improving the quality of student learning. For a list of titles of QEPs submitted for Commission review, go to www.sacscoc.org, click onto "Institutional Resources," and refer to Information.

Before moving onto the second step, crystallizing student learning outcomes, consider whether or not the selected topic requires definition. The appropriateness of topics such as "Critical Thinking" and "Academic Literacy," for example, may be self-evident, but the precise meaning of these terms may not be quite so apparent because both topics include a range of skills. Taking the time now to develop operational definitions of terms such as these will pay dividends when establishing student learning outcomes and assessment plans.

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution identified a significant issue related to student learning and justified its use for the Quality Enhancement Plan?

Protect Your Institution from Recommendations Such as These:

1. "The Committee recommends that the QEP should present a more detailed definition of student learning within the context of online instruction."
2. "The Committee recommends that the institution define what it means by a cross-cultural experience."
3. "The Committee recommends that the institution identify a specific model and definition of inquiry and inquiry-guided learning."

• Step Two: Defining the Student Learning Outcomes

As the critical issue identified by the institution is refined into a QEP topic with a narrow, manageable scope, the institution needs to begin investing energy in the establishment of specific student learning outcomes. This first draft of outcomes will, no doubt, undergo refinement as the institution's understanding of current best practices relevant to the critical issue matures. Nonetheless, this first stab at setting the QEP's learning goal(s) is an important step in setting the parameters for the research of the literature.

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution identified the benefits to be derived from the QEP?

Keeping folks focused on student learning outcomes at this stage sometimes requires a conscious effort to distinguish between the process of enhancing student learning and the resulting product of enhanced student learning. Initial excitement about the QEP topic frequently results in enthusiasm about actions that might be taken -- developing a freshman seminar, for example, or establishing learning communities. While the freshman seminar and learning communities may be viewed as outcomes of the QEP (after all, they don't exist now, but they will after the QEP is rolled out), they are not **student learning** outcomes. Rather, as elements of a new process (the "action" portion of the QEP), they are strategies to be employed to enhance student learning.

Notice how the process outcomes listed below describe what the institution will do as part of its QEP rather than what students will do as a result of the experience.

- The college will establish baseline performance measures for mathematics skills
- The faculty will use technology resources to develop and implement at least twelve web-enhanced classes over a five-year period.
- The Graduate School will provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.

Actual student learning outcomes stem from the impact of strategies such as these on the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and values of students. What will we expect students to know post-implementation of the QEP that they don't know now? What will we expect them to do then that they can't do now? How do we expect their behavior to change? What changes in values do we anticipate? Institutions whose student learning outcomes were reviewed favorably by visiting committees and the Commission presented statements such as the following:

- "Graduates will be able to describe the fundamental elements of the social, political, and economic reality of a country or region other than [their own]."
- "Graduates will be able to describe a single event from their own cultural point of view and from that of another culture."
- "Students who take the developmental math courses will succeed in the next level math course."
- "As the sender, the graduating student will generate respectful communications that have a clear purpose and are well organized, grammatically correct, and appropriate to the audience and mode of communication."

Notice how these statements focus on changes in knowledge, skills, behaviors, or values. Notice that they are (1) specific, (2) focused, and (3) measurable.

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution described the relationship between the QEP topic and student learning?

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution provided relevant and appropriate goals and objectives to improve student learning?

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution developed student learning outcomes that can be expected to lead to observable results?

Protect Your Institution from Recommendations Such as These:

1. "The Committee recommends that the institution clarify the student learning outcomes that will be addressed."
2. "Therefore, the Committee recommends that the college develop specific learning outcomes...along with a means to measure those identified outcomes."

• **Step Three: Researching the Topic**

Like any good research proposal, the QEP should be grounded in a review of best practices. Nobody has time to reinvent the wheel (and the Commission does not expect that the QEP constitute "original" research), so take full advantage of the available literature on the topic. Enlist the assistance of the library staff in assembling a bibliography of current literature on the topic. Many institutions use this step as an opportunity to build a broad base of support for the initiative by engaging a wide range of colleagues in the development of executive summaries of the items on the bibliography. Many hands not only make the burden light, but they also provide an opportunity to build broad-based involvement into the process.

Supplement that paper review with conversations with current practitioners. Not only can they bring an interactive element to this part of the process, thereby confirming or refuting initial impressions, but these conversations might also help to uncover potential consultants for the professional development component of the QEP or to find that specialized QEP evaluator for the on-site review. Do not overlook the value of conferences and workshops as an initial strategy for involving key individuals in an immersion orientation to the identified topic and as yet another opportunity to find the QEP evaluator. Identifying this evaluator early on carries with it the obvious advantage of getting on that person's calendar. Many institutions that have delayed this search have been disappointed to learn that their leading choices were already booked for the dates of their visits.

Institutional Feedback

At the inception of the QEP, it is essential to recognize the importance and timeliness of evaluating prospective external consultants, as well as having clearly defined expectations of their role in the process." (Level V institution, Class of 2005)

- *Peer Evaluator’s Perspective: Does the QEP provide evidence of careful analysis of the institutional context in which the goals will be implemented and of consideration of best practices related to the topic?*

- **Step Four: Identifying the Actions to be Implemented**

Having developed a compendium of best practices related to the selected topic, the institution now needs to sift through that research and identify the actions to be taken and the activities to be implemented on campus to bring about the desired enhancement of student learning. Of particular importance at this point is ensuring that the list is complete. For example, On-Site Review Committees expect institutions to provide professional development for participating faculty and staff when QEPs take an institution in a new direction. They also want to know that the institution has looked at each action from multiple perspectives -- impact on students, impact on faculty and staff, cost, complexity, etc. -- and addressed all of the ramifications of the plan, such as modifications of related policies and procedures, adjustments to faculty loads, re-allocation of funds, and development of a support infrastructure, as necessary.

Protect Your Institution from Recommendations Such as These:

1. “The Committee recommends that the institution provide...a clear and more detailed description of (a) the faculty training seminars and (b) the support and follow-up training activities for those who complete the seminars.”
2. “The Committee recommends the identification and implementation of additional support services likely to be required by increased online courses.”

- **Step Five: Establishing the Timeline for Implementation**

An important element in an institution’s development of its QEP, establishing the timeline for the actions identified, needs to result from a thoughtful integration of the intrinsic logic driving the development of the activities needed to produce the anticipated student learning outcomes and the realities of the human and financial resources that will be available throughout the life of the project. Because the length of time necessary to implement and refine the action plan will, of course, vary among institutions, the Commission has not prescribed a set timeframe for the Quality Enhancement Plan.

Institutions need to take care to ensure that all activities are included on the timeline and that they are rolled out in an orderly and manageable sequence. Peer evaluators need to feel confident not only that the institution has identified a series of actions that will probably affect the desired learning outcomes, but also that the institution has developed a timeline with a high probability of adherence. Furthermore, they expect the institution

to move with sufficient dispatch to have meaningful results to report to the Commission five years hence.

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Is the timeline realistic? Does it include professional development activities and administration of assessments? Does it position the institution to develop a meaningful report five years after reaffirmation?

Protect Your Institution from Recommendations Such as These:

1. “The Committee recommends that the College develop...a detailed timeline for execution of specific objectives, sub-objectives, and the multiple tasks necessary to fulfill the goals....”
2. “The Committee recommends that the institution [develop] a time line...indicating the tasks to be completed during each year.
3. “The Committee recommends a revised implementation schedule that will accomplish the QEP goals within a five-year time period.”

• **Step Six: Organizing for Success**

Early in the reaffirmation process, institutions organize to *develop* the Quality Enhancement Plan. Peer evaluators, however, expect them also to have organized to *implement* the Quality Enhancement Plan, and this is a step that is frequently overlooked prior to the arrival of the On-Site Review Committee. Describe the infrastructure for the implementation and the continuation of the QEP. Who is responsible for each activity? Are they qualified to fulfill those responsibilities? Who is responsible for keeping within budget, for monitoring progress, or for modifying the plan? Do these individuals have sufficient time to complete their task? Will they be appropriately compensated for their efforts?

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution assigned qualified individuals to implement and sustain the QEP? Are appropriate administrative processes in place?

Protect Your Institution from Recommendations Such as These:

1. “The Committee recommends that the institution decide on and implement a specific leadership structure to carry forward the [plan].”
2. “The Committee recommends that the institution clarify the management structure for the implementation and assessment of the [plan] to represent [it] as an institutional-wide initiative....”

3. “The Committee recommends that the institution demonstrate that it has named individuals to the following positions: an individual to lead [the faculty development component], an individual to coordinate internal and external assessment..., and an individual to be Coordinator of the learning communities.”
4. “The Committee recommends that the institution identify and appoint a leadership team to direct and support the implementation of...”

- **Step Seven: Identifying Necessary Resources**

An important step in the development of the QEP is estimating the costs of the physical and human resources necessary for developing, implementing, and sustaining the plan. The QEP need not require substantial investment; certainly, no QEP should require more resources than the institution can commit, no matter how valuable the plan and its results might be. Every plan, however, will require identification of personnel time, money, and materials necessary for its successful implementation. Institutions need to examine carefully the actions identified for implementation so that they can anticipate all of the personnel costs (stemming from both time commitment to the project and investment in professional development activities), all of the costs for instructional and testing materials, and all of the other related expenses. Requesting that strategies for faculty development be specified and that budgets for their implementation be detailed, for example, is a common theme in recommendations written by On-Site Review Committees that feel as though all of the costs embedded in the project have not been fully anticipated. Peer evaluators do not hesitate to cite circumstances where “hardware, software, personnel, and infrastructure” costs have not been sufficiently detailed or adequate learning resources have not been included in the budget.

Peer Evaluator’s Perspective: Has the institution provided evidence of sufficient financial, physical, and human resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP? Have sufficient academic resources been allocated?

Peer evaluators will look holistically at the institution’s capacity to both implement and sustain the QEP and must be convinced that the institution possesses the financial and human resources to carry through. Frequently underestimated by institutions, QEP budgets should stem from a realistic analysis of what is both desirable and possible.

Institutional Feedback
“The eventual cost of the QEP to the institution over the next five years will likely be much greater than what we had planned.” (Level I institution, Class of 2005)

Often overlooked in initial budget submissions are such items as the cost of time commitments from full-time personnel and re-direction of current line-item allocations to sustain the QEP. Many institutions also tend to underestimate the workload issues stemming from the management of the QEP. In those instances, peer evaluators do not

hesitate to encourage institutions to re-think the situation by encouraging them, for example, to create “support mechanisms for engaging faculty.”

Institutional Feedback

“...employment of a full-time ‘director’ to manage and facilitate the process of plan development and the actual product would be advisable.” (Level I institution, Class of 2006)

For others, a reluctance or inability to predict continuing costs in subsequent years can lead to sticker shock as the QEP gears up to full speed. As resource issues are explored and preliminary budgets developed, therefore, institutions may need to distinguish between “essentials” and “desirables” and then scale their expectations to match their capacity.

Institutional Feedback

“As a college, we have discovered the amount of work required in both human resources and financial resources to implement the QEP. We are also finding that the QEP requires an ongoing commitment to be successfully accomplished.” Level II institution, Class of 2006)

In addition to developing an appropriately detailed budget, the institution should identify the sources of the funds. How much is new money and where will it come from? How much is a re-allocation? Peer evaluators are interested not only in the budget detail and source of funding, however, but also in the institution’s commitment to fund the project as described. Consider how to demonstrate that the estimated budgets will be funded in the succeeding years.

Protect Your Institution from Recommendations Such as These:

1. “The Committee recommends that the institution develop and approve a detailed multi-year budget necessary to sustain and complete the revised QEP, including provisions for personnel, physical, and library/learning resources.”
2. “The Committee recommends the institution provide evidence it has allocated sufficient resources – fiscal, human, and physical – to implement, maintain, and complete the Quality Enhancement Plan.”
3. “The Committee recommends that the institution develop a detailed, realistic budget for the implementation of the QEP, a staffing plan that clearly delineates lines of authority and responsibility for the initiative, and a timeline that incorporates activities and outcomes related to student learning.”
4. “The Committee recommends that the institution demonstrate it has an adequate budget for the successful implementation of the QEP.”
5. “The Committee recommends that the institution develop a budget that takes into account revenue projections and thus begins to plan for cost recovery and sustainability beyond the startup years.”

- **Step Eight: Assessing the Success of the QEP**

The institution's evaluation of its QEP should be multifaceted, with attention both to key objectives and benchmarks to be achieved in the planning and implementation of the QEP as well as to the overall goals of the plan. Initially, evaluation strategies need to focus on the planning and implementation process and provide crucial feedback to those with primary responsibility for the QEP.

In evaluating the overall goals of the QEP, primary emphasis needs to be given to the impact of the QEP on the quality of student learning. On-Site Review Committees will expect details -- names of assessment instruments, timelines for their administration, processes for the review of the assessment results -- rather than general descriptions of intentions to develop instruments at some point in the future. Multiple strategies using both quantitative and qualitative measures should be employed, and student learning outcomes will require careful analysis for consistency of results across different measures and for variation among the outcomes. The chosen measures need to be both valid and reliable, and the comprehensive assessment plan should be flexible enough to accommodate, if necessary, subsequent changes made to implementation activities and timelines as a result of the analysis of previous assessment results.

Peer Evaluator's Perspective: Has the institution developed means for assessing the success of its QEP? Has the institution identified relevant internal and external measures? Has the institution developed a system for monitoring its progress? Has the institution described the process by which the results of evaluation will be used to improve student learning?

Protect Your Institution from Recommendations Such as These:

1. "The Committee recommends that the university provide evidence that it has gathered an appropriate amount and variety of baseline data for each of the pilot projects to enable a substantive analysis of the effects of the QEP...."
2. "The Committee recommends the institution develop an assessment plan for the Quality Enhancement Plan, which includes the following:
 - Measures to assess the extent to which the goals, objectives, and learning outcomes are achieved
 - A timeline for the implementation of the measures."
3. "The Committee recommends...the establishment and clear presentation of acceptable benchmarks for student performance in those courses which are included in the plan."
4. "The Committee recommends that the college enhance its overall assessment plan by (a) articulating clear and measurable expected outcomes..., (b) describing appropriate assessments for those outcomes, (c) clearly articulating how the mid-point assessment of the plan will be used to determine the appropriateness of implementing a sophomore-year initiative, (d) distinguishing student-level assessment from program-level assessment, (e) developing a systematic procedure

- for interpreting the results and reporting findings to the college community, and (f) describing how the results of assessments will be used effectively to improve student learning.”
5. “The Committee recommends that the university establish targets to assess the extent to which the intended outcomes...are being achieved.”
 6. “The Committee recommends that the revised [plan] include...multiple methods of assessment for evaluating the extent to which the goals...are achieved...”
 7. “The Committee recommends that...all areas...are assessed, including direct measures of student learning outcomes.”

• **Step Nine: Preparing the QEP for Submission to the COC**

The QEP should be clear and succinct. It may not exceed one hundred pages, including a narrative of no more than seventy-five pages and appendices of no more than twenty-five pages. Additional information about the institution, such as websites and catalogs, may be referenced. The Table of Contents for the Quality Enhancement Plan should include the following components:

- I. Executive Summary *(one page)*
- II. Process Used to Develop the QEP
Evidence of the involvement of all appropriate campus constituencies
- III. Identification of the Topic
A topic that is creative and vital to the long-term improvement of student learning
- IV. Desired student Learning Outcomes
Specific, well-defined goals related to an issue of substance and depth, expected to lead to observable results
- V. Literature Review and Best Practices
Evidence of consideration of best practices related to the topic
- VI. Actions to be Implemented
Evidence of careful analysis of institutional context in designing actions capable of generating the desired student learning outcomes

VII. Timeline

A logical calendaring of all actions to be implemented

VIII. Organizational Structure

Clear lines of responsibility for implementation and sustainability

IX. Resources

A realistic allocation of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources

X. Assessment

A comprehensive evaluation plan

XI. Appendices (optional)

• **Step Ten: Preparing the *Impact Report***

The extent to which the QEP has achieved its goals and enhanced student learning will be reported in the *Impact Report*, which will be submitted for review by the Commission five years prior to the institution's next reaffirmation. The *Impact Report* is one section of the *Fifth-Year Interim Report*, which must be completed by all member institutions. The template for the *Fifth-Year Interim Report* and directions for its completion are available at www.sacscoc.org, click onto "Institutional Resources."

The best way to prepare for developing the *Impact Report* is to develop good documentation of the implementation process. Of particular interest to the Commission are assessment results and any changes made to the final draft of the QEP – its goals/benchmarks, activities, timeline, budget, evaluation plan, etc. -- as a result of analysis of those results.

The narrative for the *Impact Report* should contain the following:

- A brief description of the institution, including a description of its current mission and its geographic service area, a description of the composition of the student population and enrollment, governance structure, summary of academic programs offered, and a description of any unusual or distinctive features of the institution
- The title and a brief description of the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan as initially presented
- A succinct list of the initial goals and intended outcomes of the QEP
- A discussion of significant changes made to the QEP and the reasons for making those changes

- A description of the QEP’s direct impact on student learning, including the achievement of goals and outcomes

The report should not exceed ten pages, including narrative and appendices.

III. Formatting the QEP

Please observe these formatting conventions when preparing the final copy of the Quality Enhancement Plan.

Font: Arial

Size: 11

Margins:

Left: 1½ “

Right, Top, Bottom: 1”

Header, Right: Name of the institution

Footer, Center: Page number

Title Page:

Title of the QEP
Name of the institution
Dates of the on-site review
Name of the CEO
Name of the accreditation liaison

Table of Contents: Begin on page i.

Narrative: Begin on page 1.

Appendices: Use upper case Roman numerals and titles

At least six weeks prior to the start of the on-site review, paper copies of the QEP must be sent to the Commission and to the members of the On-Site Review Committee. An electronic file of the document should also be submitted to the Commission.