

The Quality Enhancement Plan: Questions and Answers

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) now requires that institutions, as part of the review process for ten-year reaffirmation of accreditation, submit a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

What is the QEP and when is it due?

The QEP is a planning document that may not exceed 100 pages, including no more than 75 pages narrative and 25 pages of appendices. The QEP entails a carefully designed, focused course of action addressing one or more issues that contribute to institutional quality, with special attention to student learning. SACS describes student learning as changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or values that are attributable to the collegiate experience.

The full QEP is submitted six weeks prior to the institution's On-Site Review. Since Rollins' On-Site Review occurs in March/April 2005, the QEP is due in January 2005. A one-page executive summary will be expected when Rollins submits its Compliance Certification Report in August 2004.

What role does the QEP play in the reaffirmation process and in the life of the institution?

The QEP is a significant component of the reaffirmation process and should be designed to demonstrate the institution's capacity to address significant issues and aspirations. It is the major focus of the On-Site Review Committee's campus visit. Ultimately, it is an opportunity for institutions to challenge themselves to improve, to enhance the quality of student learning, and to add value to the institution and to the students it serves.

Who evaluates the QEP?

The On-Site Review Committee determines the acceptability of the Quality Enhancement Plan and provides analysis and advice to the institution regarding it. The On-Site Committee includes a minimum of seven reviewers in the following areas and roles: chair; evaluators in the areas of faculty, educational programs, learning or student support services, and institutional effectiveness; and two consultants selected by the institution for their expertise in the selected QEP topic area.

How do institutions go about preparing the QEP?

The QEP complements the institution's ongoing integrated, institution-wide planning and evaluation processes and is not intended to supplant or replace those ongoing processes. The institution's [Accreditation] Leadership Team is charged with providing oversight for the development of the QEP. 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; who have expertise in planning and assessment; and who have responsibility for managing and allocating institutional resources.

In preparing the QEP, an institution is expected to engage the wider academic community in a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the effectiveness of the learning environment to support student learning and to accomplish the mission of the institution. Decisions should be based on empirical data and analysis whenever possible. The concept of student learning should permeate the goals of the QEP; however, its inclusion can be broadly interpreted. There should be clear potential for an observable impact on student learning, and the focus should be within the resource capability of the institution.

What are the key elements in the QEP?

- Brief descriptive title; maximum of 75 pages and 25 pages of appendices
- Persuasive rationale/justification for the QEP and its importance
- Statement of student learning appropriate to the QEP
- Review of "good practices" related to the QEP
- Support among campus constituency groups and evidence of such support
- Specific, well-defined goals that focus on improving student learning
- Implementation framework including timelines and necessary resources
- Evidence that the institution has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP
- Comprehensive evaluation plan clearly linked to the QEP goals
- Demonstration that institution has the means for assessing the QEP

What follow-up action can Rollins expect?

The institution is required to respond to all recommendations and any needed QEP improvements identified by the On-Site Review Committee. Implementation of the QEP is carried out in multiple-year cycles with an Impact Report due after the fifth year (2010 for Rollins).