



The First Year Experience

Community Update

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In 2008, faculty, staff, and administrators began a self-study process leading to the development and implementation of a first-year course and program which is research-based and aligned with the College's mission. That same year was my first year as a full-time faculty at what was then Edison College. Participating in this process was an initiation for me; I had the opportunity to learn from both veteran professors as well as faculty like me who were newer to the institution. Those of us that were here at the time may remember numerous lengthy meetings where we worked together to set goals and lay out the plan to operationalize the objectives. Great minds worked together to choose the verbiage that best embodied the course goals; words such as "engender" and "imbued" were put on trial for their merits and failings. It seems like we went through every emotion during that time; we laughed, we cried, we argued, and we compromised. The resulting Cornerstone Experience course became the focus of the College's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as supported by our regional accreditor, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The Cornerstone Experience has an overarching goal of developing critical thinking skills among students. Faculty from across many disciplines have supported the course through involvement in QEP committees, curriculum development, assessment, and serving as instructors. Without fail, student feedback has highlighted that relationships with Cornerstone faculty has transformed them in positive ways. I am honored to work with such a talented, dedicated faculty.

It is difficult to believe that we are now completing our fifth year of full implementation of our QEP. The Cornerstone Experience course and related first-year programs have enhanced student success, persistence, and satisfaction in measurable ways. The success is a credit to many faculty and staff across all of Florida SouthWestern State College's campuses and departments. We will prepare and submit a QEP Impact Report to SACSCOC in Fall, 2017. In addition to increasing student achievement and satisfaction across many metrics, the QEP has strengthened the relationship among Academic Affairs and Student Affairs for the betterment of the students. Before the QEP, Academic and Student Affairs had a positive relationship, but there was little opportunity to work together to align our goals, and support each other's initiatives. The QEP galvanized a collective effort towards student improvement, and though we all can feel the effects of "committee fatigue," I am grateful every day for the relationships I have developed with my colleagues in Student Affairs, and for the cross-departmental collaborations that are now just part of the fabric of FSW culture. As we complete the QEP cycle, we will continue to nurture these collaborations as we work together to realize the goals of the *Dedicate to Graduate* initiative.

Q

E

P

Milestones



Foundations of Excellence Committees formed for each of the nine dimensions



Pilot of the Cornerstone Experience Course



Year 2

103 class sections serving 2,298 students

Year 4

197 class sections serving 4,629 students



2008

2009 -2010

2011

Spring 2012

2012-2013

2013-2014

2014-2015

2015-2016

2016-2017

Identification of critical student learning issues



Creation of QEP/FYE Steering Committee



Year 1

Implementation of the Cornerstone Experience Course and FYE Programming
58 class sections serving 1,115 students



Creation of the Critical Thinking Lecture Series

Year 3

Full implementation of Cornerstone as a graduation requirement for all degree seeking students
185 class sections serving 4,069 students



Year 5

212 class sections serving 4,743 students and counting



QEP Fast Facts

755

class sections

16,854

students and counting

34,486

student sign-in's for FYE Programming

4,406

attendees for the Critical Thinking
Lecture Series (since fall 2015)

A Word from Our Founding Cornerstone Faculty



Myra H. Walters

Professor of Speech
and
Founding Faculty
for Cornerstone

I can't believe we are in the fifth and final year of our current Quality Enhancement Plan. As I began to reflect I feel both sadness and joy. When I think about my feelings as this QEP comes to a close, I remember the time when my parents waved good bye to me as I stood outside my dorm at The University of Alabama eager to start my life as a college student, and the sadness I felt as they drove away. Although I was looking forward to college, I couldn't help but think about the people and the rituals I would miss. I would miss my parents and my younger sister and brother. I would miss spending time with my older sister who was brave enough to teach me how to drive. I would miss sharing meals most evenings with my siblings and my parents as we sat around the table and found humor in the events of the day. As the focus for this QEP comes to a close, I am somewhat sad that some of my monthly meetings will also end. In this age of technology, where most communication involves a computer, the QEP brought faculty, staff, and administrators face-to-face either in person or virtually on a regular basis for the past five years. This enabled me to build relationships with co-workers that I did not know or that I had only known through e-mails. I am sad that I will no longer routinely have a reason to meet with these colleagues to not only achieve the goals of the QEP, but also to share donuts, coffee, cake and a whole lot of laughs as we became better acquainted with each other.

But just as my leaving home for college doldrums lifted and was replaced by many positive experiences; after the end of the QEP, I am also left with much to celebrate. I have an overwhelming feeling of pure joy as I think about what we have accomplished with our first QEP. We have established a top rate first year experience course that will truly be a cornerstone for FSW students for years to come. We are receiving national recognition for creating an exceptional first year experience for our students through the Cornerstone Course as evidenced by the number of faculty and administrators who have had workshops proposals accepted for presentations at the Annual First Year Experience Conference. We started with just a few sections of this course; today we run over 200 sections. Being three years away from retirement, I can't help but to reflect upon the legacies I hope to leave at FSW. One is that I have contributed to the development of critical thinking as I taught students to be fair-minded communicators; and secondly, that I have contributed to their overall positive college experience for all students through my involvement with the creation of the Cornerstone Course.

Critical Thinking Lecture Series



Leoma Lovegrove is an impressionist-expressionist painter know worldwide for her vivid colorful paintings. Her work is displayed in Jimmy Carter's Presidential Library, George W. Bush's Presidential Library, and is part of a private collection at the White House. Lovegrove facilitated an engaging lecture entitled "Your Life Should be a Work of Art."

94%

of students "strongly agreed" and "agreed" that the presentation was engaging and understandable.



97%

of students "strongly agreed" and "agreed" that the presentation was interesting and informative.

Dr. John Myer, Dean of the School of Business and Technology facilitating a session entitled "Critical Thinking: Is It Really Practical?"

FYE Programming



Engaging Presentations

Critical Thinking Challenges

FYE Programming Student Survey Metrics (January 2017– to date)

- 95.34% of surveyed students “strongly agree” and “agree” that the session increased their knowledge of the topic.
- 93.77% of surveyed students “strongly agree” and “agree” that the material covered was interesting.
- 89.59% of surveyed students would recommend the session to a friend.

n = 3,691

Student Feedback

“The information was interesting and the presenters gave good advice. I enjoyed seeing how others manage their time and set priorities.”

– **Time Management**

“Fun games; best GPS yet! It hurt my brain in the best possible way.”

– **Critical Thinking Challenges**

“Very good presentation; now I'm ready to save money.”

– **Tech Tools to Help You Save Money**

Emaze Presentation Tool



Strategies for College Success