

Actions to be Implemented

Community building and goal setting /tracking learning outcomes will be incorporated into the following components of the first semester experience for program-placed, first-time-in-college students. The centerpiece and most significant component of the first semester experience will be the first semester seminar, described below in detail.

Pre-Orientation Online Module

In order to make space for activities that promote goal setting and community building in the new student orientation program, the QEP working group will design and implement a pre-orientation online module that students will be required to complete prior to attending orientation. The online module will give students an opportunity to explore the online resources they will need to use as students – nr.edu, the learning management system, Student Information System (SIS) and the NRCC library website. It will also walk them through an advising check-up that will raise flags to orientation staff if individual advising is required at orientation. Additionally, it will cover most of the basic information that students need to start their first day of classes – academic calendar, how to purchase books, how to apply for and access financial aid, programs of study, etc. Although community building will be difficult in a purely online format, students will be asked to complete a few assessments and to then set an initial educational goal for themselves which will be stored in the CLAS platform and accessible to students, faculty and staff for future advising conversations.

New Student Orientation (revised)

The required orientation program for new students (see Appendix 8 for current program agenda) will be revamped to emphasize community building and goal setting. Because students will learn much of the basic information currently shared during orientation in the online pre-

orientation module, time will be available for getting to know college faculty, staff and classmates. Potential community building activities during orientation include a collective mural project, community service activities, and/or a discussion about a common reading. Additional goal setting activities will be developed and integrated into the agenda. These will allow students to “reality check” the educational goals they set in the pre-orientation module to see if they align with their skills, values, financial resources, and social/work obligations. Sharing their goals publicly will also increase a sense of public accountability for students in achieving those goals later. Information from this goal setting/tracking activity will be stored in the CLAS system so that students can revisit and revise throughout the First Semester Seminar.

Open House Kick-off Celebration

The College will continue to invite new students and their supporters (parents, spouses, friends, etc.) to an open house kick-off celebration on the Friday and Saturday before classes start during the fall and spring semesters. Attendees will be able to take tours; participate in fun activities to get to know campus; listen to advice from current and former students, faculty and others; meet their instructors and find their classrooms; as well as purchase their books, all prior to the first day of classes. This event is important in the context of the First Semester Experience primarily because of the research on the significant role families play in student success, particularly for first-generation Appalachian students. Plans include developing not only informational events for the kick-off celebration, but also ongoing resources for students’ families and other supporters like social media groups and websites.

First Semester Seminar

Pre-college events will lay the groundwork for students to show up for class with the knowledge and relationships they need to be successful on the first day of classes, but the real

challenge lies in sustaining those relationships; presenting the information they need when they need it; and regularly monitoring their progress toward their educational goals, rewarding them when they reach milestones and reminding them when they do not. Based on the literature review, best practices in other institutions, and institutional context, we plan to create a First Semester Seminar that will combine two to three common first semester courses into a four to nine credit combined seminar. The seminar will allow students to be a part of a cohort that transitions to college, learns subject matter, and supports each other through the first semester.

One challenge with the current student success course (SDV-100) is that it attempts to evenly spread out course material over a semester when the students need the advising information in more intense infusions during key points of the semester (namely at the beginning and then again around mid-terms and registration for next semester courses). And while the study skills, time management and health related information is timeless, learning about it in the abstract does not maximize its usefulness for all learning styles, particularly those who learn through doing. Incorporating these lessons into more academic courses provides students opportunities to practice those skills while learning important subject matter and writing skills. A final challenge is that SDV-100 is only a one-credit course so many students opt to take it online and even the in-person courses are limited in terms of the potential to create a cohort of students who support each other in that first semester. By combining SDV-100 with two other academic courses, students will have an opportunity to learn and practice their study skills as well as to write reflective papers related to student success because learning objectives for the courses are overlapping and can be merged into combined assignments.

For four to nine hours each week, these cohorts will be in class learning together. This time in itself will contribute to the sense of belonging and community the QEP fosters. But in addition to the time, the seminar instructors will revamp their individual courses in order to design assignments and activities that reinforce overlapping and complementary learning objectives while also building a sense of community and belonging within the cohort group. Similarly,

instructors will develop goal setting and tracking activities that also serve to advance the learning objectives of the courses. These complementary activities might include service learning, civic engagement or other creative ways of learning that would be impossible within the parameters of a single course.

QEP team members went through an exercise of creating a sample syllabus for a combined English composition and study skills course. (See Appendix 9 for sample syllabus.) The syllabus included the following possible assignments that could blend both courses' objectives:

- Exercises on detecting plagiarism; understanding the impact of culture on academic appropriation
- Library orientation
- Research on focus and attention and the impact of devices: students perform a self-study alongside academic research and writing on college student performance and technology
- Research and writing on free speech codes and campus conduct
- Annotation and active reading assignments and self-assessments

This planning exercise was to create a two-course, four-credit combined seminar; the QEP proposed activity will be to create and implement a three-course, seven to nine credit combined seminar for transfer students and a different combination for Career and Technical Education (CTE) students. For transfer students, this seminar, taught during the student's first semester, will combine one of each of the following groupings of courses:

1. College Success Skills - SDV-100
2. English Composition – ENG 111, ENF 2, ENG111/ENF3
3. Introductory history courses – HIS 101 (History of Western Civilization I), HIS 111 (History of World Civilization I), or HIS 121 (United States History I)

A common first semester seminar combination of courses for Career and Technical Education (CTE) students is a little more difficult to design given the wide variety in CTE program

requirements. The pilot first semester seminar for CTE programs will combine ETR 113 (D.C. and A.C. Fundamentals) with SDV-100 for a four-credit course. The results of that pilot will help to determine the seminar course combination for future CTE seminars.

Advisors will strongly encourage all students to take the in-class combination of first semester seminar courses, but this approach will not be possible for a small number of NRCC students. For these students, the College will offer an online alternate seminar, the instructors for which will devise creative strategies for implementing goal setting/tracking and community building activities into the online experience.

Faculty Training

Instructors can not be expected to implement learning objectives that they do not understand. Hence, the QEP also includes a phased-in plan for training all instructors on basic student success initiatives as well as the specifics of the proposed First Semester Experience and its associated learning outcomes. In fact, the QEP team developed a draft list of faculty and staff learning outcomes that mirror the learning outcomes established for students. (See Appendix 10 for that list.)

Although the QEP is focused on the components described above, during the community process to design the QEP, the QEP team heard that faculty were interested in learning more about how to incorporate goal setting/tracking and community building into all of their courses. So the College also plans to hold in-service trainings on best practices that emerge from the seminar pilots with a focus on how those practices might be incorporated into other courses across the curriculum.

Finally, the work will include a new faculty/staff onboarding one-on-one training that will cover student success initiatives, CLAS and the first semester experience. Part of that onboarding

process will include inviting new faculty and staff to participate in at least one new student orientation program.