Inaugural issue of the R.E.A.S.O.N! newsletter

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Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies

WELCOME to the inaugural issue of the R.E.A.S.O.N! newsletter. We are excited about the impressive progress faculty, staff and students have made this year to begin implementing the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). It is important to share information about the QEP with the campus community. R.E.A.S.O.N! is one way that will be employed to provide regular updates regarding implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). “R.E.A.S.O.N! Creating Collected Pathways to Develop Critical Thinking Skills in Students.”

R.E.A.S.O.N! will highlight innovative practices in curriculum design, active learning pedagogies, co-curricular learning, assessment strategies, advising/mentoring techniques, interdepartmental collaborations, student achievements related to critical thinking, and faculty engagement in the scholarship of teaching, learning, and advising related to developing critical thinking in students. Building on campus-wide engagement that began in 2006 to select a theme for the QEP and to develop the plan, R.E.A.S.O.N! will provide information to continue the discussions and collaborations. The newsletter also will provide a way to share information about the development of a culture of inquiry, that is, an institutional commitment to educational effectiveness and quality informed by campus-wide engagement in learning, innovation, and scholarship – key components of any QEP.

In this issue, the Spring 2009 communities of inquiry are highlighted with a special focus on the Active and Collaborative Learning Community of Inquiry. A community of inquiry (CoI) refers to the process of collaborative, synergistic learning that occurs when faculty and staff, who share a common interest in some subject or problem, work in teams to explore ideas, find solutions, and build innovations, thus supporting student learning and development. Faculty and staff Cols are designed to engage interdisciplinary team in creating innovative curricular and co-curricular approaches to develop higher-order reasoning skills in students, including critical thinking. Your comments and suggestions are encouraged as we work together to achieve the outcomes related to developing critical thinking skills in students.

1. Active and Collaborative Learning
   Andrew Arrigo Interdisciplinary Studies, Arthur Bowman Biology, Mildred Fuller Allied Health, Patrick Majaikwe History, Glenda Millet-Perrett Health, Physical Education, and Exercise Science, Katrina Hall-Porritt Chemistry

2. Critical Thinking Assessment
   Michael Geuter English and Foreign Languages, Joseph D’Silva Biology, Kimberly Hanlon Political Science

3. Information Literacy
   D’Nita Andrews-Graham Computer Science, Lynnese Harrison Library, Theresa Humphries Computer Science, Pamela Lomangino Allied Health

4. Living and Learning Communities
   Faith Fitzgerald Residence Life & Housing, Linda Johnson English and Foreign Languages, Ronald Jones Allied Health, Suk-Hae Kim Social Work, Frances Williams Engineering

5. Service-Learning
   Eleanor Hoy Technology, Debalena Majumdar Biology, Marie St. Rose Allied Health, Stephanie Walker English and Foreign Languages, Randolph Wilson Political Science

ARTICLES

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ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

NSU students report slightly lower perceptions of academic challenge (e.g., number of assigned readings and written papers) than students in peer institutions and in the national average.

ACTIVE LEARNING

NSU students report higher levels of engagement in active and collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., group work, service-learning) than students in peer institutions and in the national average.

CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

NSU students perceive the NSU campus environment (e.g., academic and social help, relationships with campus constituents) to be more supportive than students in peer institutions and in the national average.

STUDENTS-FACULTY

NSU students report more frequent and meaningful interaction with faculty members (e.g., discussion of assignments, grades, and career plans) than students in peer institutions and in the national average.

GROWTH IMPERATIVE: THE 5-POINT PLAN

Y.T. Shah Provost

TO remain competitive in the current socio-economic environment and achieve its vision of becoming the institution of choice for all prospective students, Norfolk State University has no option other than to grow – grow the number and caliber of NSU students; grow faculty expertise in teaching, advising, research, and community service; and grow administrators’ responsiveness to campus needs. The Five-Point Plan has been intentionally designed to address this growth imperative by challenging the campus community to raise the level of self-expectations, engage in interdepartmental dialogue, and embrace innovative thinking and evidence-based action.

Implementation of the ambitious Five-Point Plan outlined below requires broad-based involvement of all campus constituents and alignment of institutional plans and strategies. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Communities of Inquiry presented in this issue of the R.E.A.S.O.N! newsletter demonstrate one of many ways in which faculty and staff can take leadership roles in implementing the Five-Point Plan.

First, as collaborative interdisciplinary groups of colleagues, Communities of Inquiry (CoI) enhance the campus collegial environment and advance the teacher–scholar model of faculty work by encouraging faculty engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Second, by implementing creative and rigorous critical thinking pedagogical approaches, CoIs work to improve the NSU academic image, attract prospective students, and equip current students with cognitive skills, abilities, and dispositions necessary to successfully progress through the college curriculum. Finally, assessment, a key component embedded in each CoI, ensures accountability and provides necessary feedback for planning and decision-making.

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Y.T. Shah, Provost
articles from communities of inquiry

Volume 01, Issue 01

1. Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL)

2. Information Literacy (IL)

3. Service-Learning (SL)

Reason:

**Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL)**

The acquisition of a terminal degree does not make one an educator in the deeper sense of the term. Discipline and research skills are important, but an educator needs to infuse the discipline and research processes into curriculum that will motivate students to think, to engage, and to learn. One of the central goals of an academic institution is to prepare students for life after college, and an educator cannot do this without knowing the place of content and context in the curriculum. The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework for understanding the relationship between content and context in the curriculum. The content-oriented approach is contrasted with the context-oriented approach, and the ways in which these approaches can be used to enhance student learning are described. The author concludes with a summary of the key ideas and recommendations for future research.

**Information Literacy (IL)**

The importance of information literacy in the classroom is widely recognized. There is a need to develop a framework for understanding the role of information literacy in teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework for understanding the role of information literacy in teaching and learning. The paper presents a model of information literacy as a set of skills that enhances their ability to think critically and to understand and use information. The model is based on a review of the literature and interviews with educators. The model is designed to help educators understand the role of information literacy in teaching and learning. The model is used to develop instructional materials for the Information Literacy (IL) course.

**Service-Learning (SL)**

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