

REASON

A Quality Enhancement Plan

*Creating Coherent Pathways to
Develop Critical Thinking
Skills in Students*

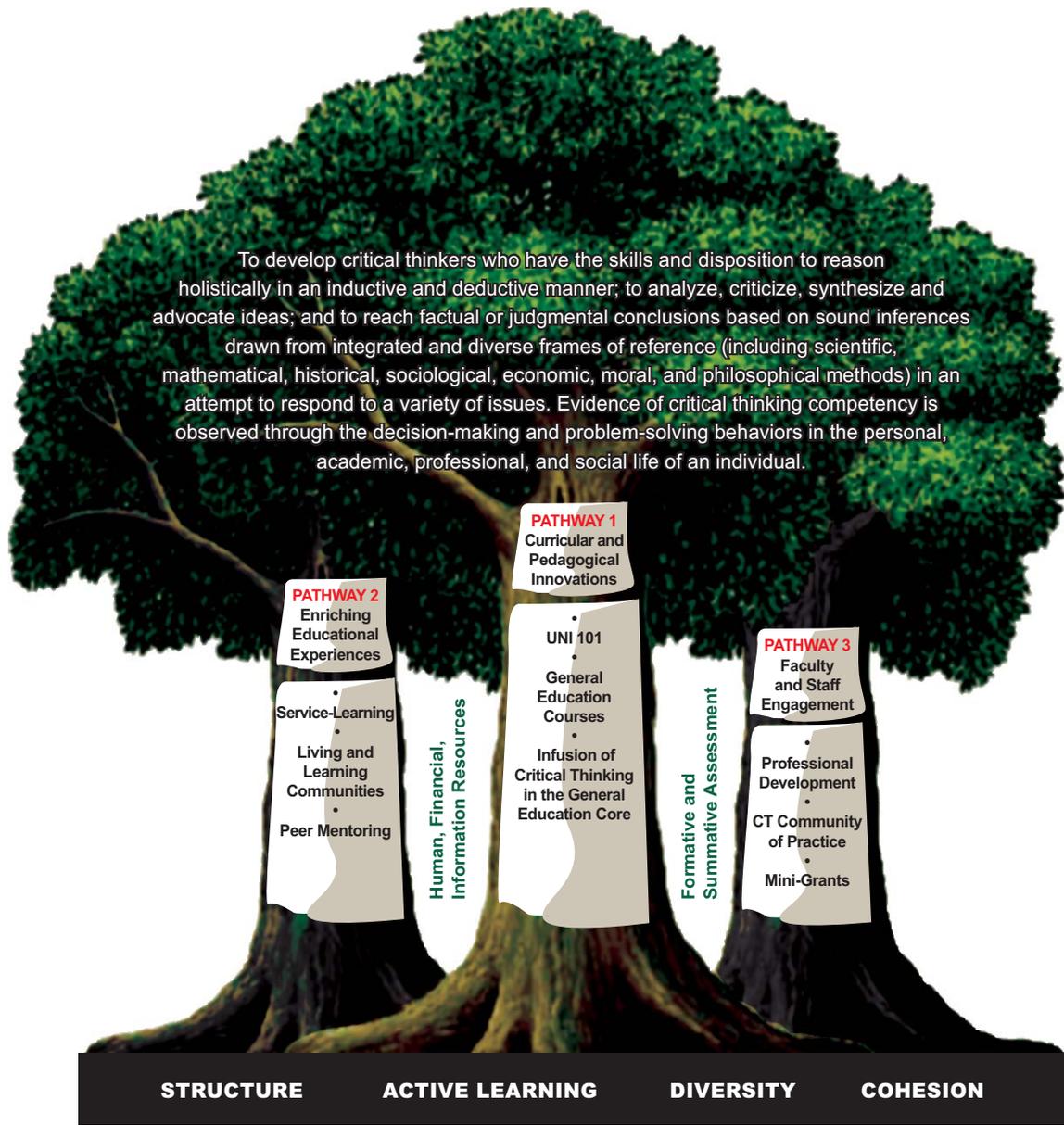
Prepared for the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

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Creating Coherent Pathways to Develop Critical Thinking Skills in Students



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Quality Enhancement Plan

Outcomes

The two great points to be gained in intellectual culture are the discipline and the furniture of the mind; expanding its powers, and storing it with knowledge.

(The Yale Report, 1828, p. 7)

The key to educational excellence ...lies ... in fostering habits of mind that enable students to continue their learning, engage new questions, and reach informed judgments.

(AAC&U, 2007, p. 30)

Upon completion of the general education core, Norfolk State University undergraduate students will be able to:

Reflect on information presented in diverse media and diverse frames of reference to identify main ideas, themes, and assumptions and make comparative judgments from data.

Evaluate the validity and limitations of assumptions in relation to evidence and identify limitations and contradictions in an event.

Argue to effectively advocate ideas and alternative solutions; identify, develop, and evaluate arguments and issues.

Solve problems in creative, efficient, and effective ways to demonstrate creative problem-solving skills.

Obtain desired goals or outcomes by assessing potential deviations from such outcomes; evaluate and implement a plan to work towards a goal or conclusion.

Network to communicate ideas, alternative solutions, and desired outcomes in a variety of media and in diverse frames of reference; communicate the results, findings, and recommendations in a variety of media.

Building on solid critical thinking skills, students will demonstrate competence in scientific and quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and written and oral communication.

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY
Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)

Theoretical Framework and Implementation Model

Curriculum Design	From Theory		To Practice			
	Critical Thinking Dimensions	Perry's Positions of Intellectual Development	Knefelkamp & Widick's Developmental Instruction Model	QEP Action Areas		
Critical Thinking Tests (Local and Standardized) / Critical Thinking Rubrics Co-Curricular Experiences / Revised General Education Core / Faculty & Staff Development	General Education Core Tier 1 / UNI 101	1. Identify main ideas, themes, and assumptions.	Dualism Dualism represents a mode of developing meaning that tends to view the world dichotomously.	Structure Framework and direction provided to students.	Pathways Curriculum Design	Focal Areas Development of critical thinking skills
	General Education Core Tier 2	2. Make comparative judgments from data, systematic observations, and practice or discipline wisdom. 3. Determine the validity and implications of assumptions. 4. Identify limitations and contradictions in an event. 5. Analyze and evaluate arguments and issues. 6. Demonstrate creative problem-solving skills. 7. Implement and evaluate a plan to work towards a goal or conclusion.	Multiplicity Multiplicity refers to honoring diverse views when the right answers are not yet known. All opinions are equally valid. Relativism Relativism is characterized by recognition of the need to support opinions. All opinions no longer are equally valid. Knowledge is contextually defined and based on evidence and supporting arguments. Commitment Commitment involves choices, decisions, and affirmations that derive from the vantage point of relativism.	Diversity Variety and complexity of alternatives and perspectives that are presented and encouraged. Experiential Learning Concreteness, directness, and engagement contained in learning activities. Cohesion¹ A safe environment where risk taking is encouraged.	Information Diversity Campus Diversity Active Learning Pedagogies Integrative Learning Activities Advising Peer Mentoring Undergraduate Research Opportunities Student-Faculty Interaction Faculty Development	Information Literacy Awareness of and appreciation for human diversity Reinforcement of critical thinking skills through: Talking & Listening Small group discussions and projects Writing Seminars Case studies Reading Core texts Reflecting Service learning Reflective journals

¹ The term *cohesion* will replace the term *personalism*. From Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998), *personalism* refers to the creation of a safe environment where risk taking is encouraged and is manifested in an interactive environment that demonstrates enthusiasm derived from the course material, instructor availability, and comprehensive feedback. For the purposes of the QEP, this definition is retained for the term *cohesion*.

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January 24, 2008

Greetings from the President of Norfolk State University

As Norfolk State University's (NSU) president, I am pleased to present the University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as part of the reaffirmation of accreditation by the Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

The QEP, *Creating Coherent Pathways to Develop Critical Thinking Skills in Students*, represents the broad-based, active involvement of faculty, staff, students, alumni, administrators, and community representatives since fall 2005 to study critical issues related to enhancing student learning. After a year of study and discussion, the campus agreed to focus the QEP on documented gaps between perceived gains in higher-order cognitive skills by undergraduate students and student performance on locally-developed and standardized measures of cognitive skills and core competencies.

The QEP presents NSU's proposal to address these gaps by embedding critical thinking pedagogies and assessment strategies across the general education curriculum. In addition, the QEP also proposes to develop educationally-enriching co-curricular activities to reinforce student achievement of critical thinking outcomes. A comprehensive, ongoing faculty and staff development program also is proposed in order to sustain the quality improvements realized as a result of successful implementation of the QEP.

NSU is an exciting, dynamic learning institution that takes great pride in providing relevant, high-quality learning experiences and activities consistent with the traditions that define Norfolk State University. On behalf of the campus community, I am pleased to present the Quality Enhancement Plan for your review and comment. We thank you for your commitment to the peer review process and look forward to receiving your comments during the upcoming on-site visit.

Sincerely,



Carolyn W. Meyers, Ph.D.
President

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Executive Summary

Norfolk State University proposes to improve critical thinking skills in undergraduate students by embedding critical thinking teaching, learning, and assessment strategies across the general education curriculum. Educationally-enriching co-curricular activities will be developed and implemented to reinforce and sustain student achievement of critical thinking outcomes. Co-curricular activities will include living and learning communities, a peer mentoring program, and service-learning activities. An ongoing, comprehensive faculty and staff development program will be developed to ensure consistent application of critical thinking pedagogies and assessment strategies. The program also will develop, support, and sustain improvement of critical thinking learning outcomes in undergraduate students. In addition to a comprehensive annual schedule of faculty and staff development sessions conducted by external and internal consultants, the program also will include faculty communities of practice organized by general education subject area.

Background and Focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan

Effective critical thinking skills are a hallmark of a high-quality education and a critical characteristic of productive citizens who are able to contribute to a dynamic global society.

A. Critical Issues Addressed in the QEP

Rooted in a rich liberal studies tradition, critical thinking dispositions and skills stimulate a spirit of critical inquiry and provide a foundation for lifelong learning. The proposed QEP supports the mission of the general education program to develop informed persons who possess a rational, open-mindedness that leads to analytical and critical patterns of thought. Similarly, professional programs such as Nursing, Social Work, and Teacher Education value critical thinking as an essential skill students must possess prior to matriculation in the professional component of the undergraduate program.

B. Significant Issues Related to Student Learning and Improving the Learning Environment

Norfolk State University (NSU) students report higher or equal levels of engagement in higher-order learning activities than the national average on measures such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Given relatively high levels of self-reported engagement in learning activities focused on higher-order reasoning skills, students demonstrate very modest results on locally-developed core competency assessments of critical thinking skills. For example, 71% of students achieved a relatively low passing cut-off score of 60% on three of five core critical thinking competency dimensions.

Two conclusions may explain the apparent contradiction. First, NSU students generally perceive significant growth in cognitive skills, but many fail to meet critical thinking performance standards set by NSU faculty. Second, systematically administered, value-added direct measures of critical thinking skills are needed in order to provide feedback to students and faculty regarding student development of cognitive skills. Results from the measures can be used to guide the development and implementation of pedagogical and learning strategies to enhance cognitive skill development in students, such as critical thinking. For these reasons, it is important for faculty to continually challenge and support students in developing higher-order reasoning skills.

C. Relevant Goals and Objectives Related to Improving Student Learning

The primary goal of the proposed QEP is to develop critical thinkers. These thinkers will have the skills and dispositions to analyze, criticize, synthesize and advocate ideas. Students also will be able to reason

holistically in an inductive and deductive manner and to reach factual or judgmental conclusions based on sound inferences drawn from integrated and diverse frames of reference, in an attempt to respond to a variety of issues. The frames of reference include scientific, mathematical, historical, sociological, economic, moral, and philosophical methods.

The objectives of the QEP are to improve critical thinking skills in undergraduate students by:

1. Implementing curricular revisions to enhance the learning environment and to support achievement of critical thinking outcomes by undergraduate students.
2. Developing enriching co-curricular activities to promote and enhance student learning and intellectual development outside of the classroom through living and learning communities, developing a peer mentoring program, and enhancing service-learning and civic engagement activities.
3. Developing a comprehensive, annual faculty and staff development program to build expertise in critical thinking pedagogies and assessment strategies embedded across the general education core in order to support and sustain improvement of critical thinking learning outcomes in undergraduate students.
4. Monitoring program implementation and conducting ongoing research, assessment, and program evaluation in order to ensure the sustainability of quality improvements in student outcomes.
5. Developing a resource repository of critical thinking pedagogies, assessment, and student development for use by faculty, staff, and students.

D. Benefits to be Derived from the Quality Enhancement Plan

Anticipated benefits from the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) include, but are not limited to:

1. A revised and enhanced general education core program focused on developing and improving critical thinking skills in undergraduate students.
2. An increase in student pre-test and post-test scores on direct measures of critical thinking skills.
3. An increase in student achievement of educational and professional goals. For example, improved passing rates on professional certification and licensure examinations and an increase in graduate and professional school enrollment is expected.
4. An increase in scholarly and creative activities by faculty and students focused on enhancing critical thinking outcomes.
5. An NSU Critical Thinking Website to support faculty communities of practice in sharing innovative pedagogies, practices, tools, teaching and learning strategies, assessment practices, training and workshop materials, and program effectiveness information.
6. A Critical Thinking Resource and Information Room for use by faculty, staff, and students and supported by the University Library and the Office of Quality Enhancement and Critical Thinking Studies.
7. A critical thinking teaching and learning database to build and identify a cadre of faculty trained in effective teaching, learning, and assessment strategies to serve in consultative, training, research, and tutoring roles.
8. An increase in faculty confidence and expertise with reference to teaching, developing, and assessing critical thinking skills in undergraduate students.

Institutional Capability to Initiate and Continue the Quality Enhancement Plan

In order to ensure objectives are met and to ensure continuity, sustainability, coordination, and appropriate oversight for the various components of the QEP, an effective administrative structure is required.

A. Implementation and Completion Timeline

Initial implementation steps will begin in spring 2008 with the initiation of a formal search for a QEP director and identification of an interim director to oversee start-up activities such as handling details for a successful search, establishing the office in the identified location, initiating start-up marketing plans, and working with the General Education Council and QEP Committee to implement preliminary plans for summer and fall 2008 activities.

Full implementation of the three pathways to enhance critical thinking skills in undergraduate students – e.g., revision and review of the general education core to embed critical thinking outcomes, faculty development, and co-curricular activities – will begin in fall 2008. The pathways will be reviewed and evaluated annually beginning in 2008 through 2013. Implementation plans and strategies will be revised as necessary on an ongoing basis. A program impact study will be conducted in 2012-2013. Results from the annual evaluations and the program impact study will be used to inform continuation plans for the QEP after 2013.

B. QEP Staff

The Office of Quality Enhancement and Critical Thinking Studies will be established in the summer of 2008 to support implementation and oversight of the QEP. The office will be staffed by a full-time director and a full-time administrative support specialist. Two faculty coordinators, each on a one course release per semester, also will support the QEP. The QEP director will report to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and will be responsible for successful implementation of all components of the QEP, including collaborating with the University Library and the Office of Information Technology to ensure appropriate access to academic resources and technology to support implementation and sustainability of the QEP.

The primary function of the office is to ensure that learning and program outcomes are met and to ensure ongoing assessment and review processes inform program planning, decision-making, and improvement of student learning outcomes. The office also is responsible for effective faculty and staff development activities and the development of curricular and co-curricular strategies to support student achievement of critical thinking outcomes.

C. Financial and Physical Resources to Support, Sustain, and Complete the QEP

As part of the annual University budget proposal and approval process in fall 2007, an initial start-up budget of \$383,733 was approved to establish and support implementation of the QEP and program activities in 2008-2009. In addition, a tentative budget for 2009-2013 was developed and was based on an average of approximately \$373,000 annually with an allowance for five (5) percent increases annually. Annual resource needs for the QEP will follow existing University processes and procedures for annual budget requests and approvals. A permanent cost center has been established for the QEP effective July 1, 2008 to institutionalize QEP operations and to formalize establishment of the QEP within the University structure and existing policies and procedures.

D. Academic Resources and Systems to Implement and Sustain QEP Outcomes

Student achievement of outcomes related to the Quality Enhancement Plan will be developed by embedding critical thinking pedagogies and learning strategies throughout the general education core. Critical thinking outcomes will be reinforced and sustained through: 1) significant enhancement of service learning activities, 2) development of living and learning communities for students, and 3) enrichment and expansion of peer mentoring programs. Implementation of such programs will provide students with opportunities to practice and assess their abilities to think critically. Enriching educational experiences such as service-learning, living and learning communities, and peer mentoring facilitate the development of intentional learners – "...integrative thinkers who can see connections in seemingly disparate information and draw on a wide range of knowledge to make decisions. They adapt the skills learned in one situation to problems encountered in another. . . . As a result, intentional learners succeed even when instability is the only constant (AAC&U Greater Expectations National Panel, 2002, pp. 21-22)."

E. Administrative Processes for Maintaining Progress of Quality Improvements

As manager of the Office of Quality Enhancement and Critical Thinking Studies, the QEP director will report to the Vice President for Academic Affairs regarding all administrative and operational processes as well as progress in achieving and sustaining quality improvements related to the Quality Enhancement Plan. The QEP director will have primary responsibility for ensuring ongoing assessment of all components of the QEP and for ensuring results are used for planning, improvement, and decision-making. The QEP staff, programs, and all components related to implementation of, and operations for, the Quality Enhancement Plan will be subject to established University and state policies and procedures. In collaboration with the General Education Council and the QEP Committee, the QEP director will ensure critical thinking learning outcomes are achieved, curricular review of the general education core is conducted systematically, curricular revisions are implemented in accordance with curriculum review and approval procedures, faculty and staff development is implemented and evaluated as planned, and co-curricular experiences are developed, implemented, assessed, and revised as appropriate.

Assessment of the Quality Enhancement Plan

Formative assessment and process evaluation measures will include assessment of entry-level critical thinking skills possessed by undergraduate students. Pre-tests and post-tests of critical thinking skills as direct measures of cognitive development also will be administered as well as locally-developed course-embedded assessments, common course assignments and projects across general education subject areas, annual curriculum mapping and alignment reviews, course syllabus reviews, and general education course audits by subject area. The timeline and cycle for administration of the assessment measures will begin in fall 2008 and will continue through 2013. An Assessment Map and Timeline for QEP outcomes and activities have been developed and are included in the proposal. The QEP director will review and update the map and timeline routinely.

A. Means for Assessing Success of the QEP

The assessment and evaluation processes for the QEP will be aligned with University policies and processes. The QEP director will have primary responsibility for ensuring ongoing assessment and evaluation of all components of the QEP and ensuring results are used for planning, improvement, and decision-making. The QEP director will be expected to work closely with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IEA) with respect to developing a comprehensive assessment and evaluation plan, adhering to University assessment and evaluation policies, including reporting requirements, and seeking assistance in the identification and development of appropriate assessment and evaluation measures. The QEP director will become a member of the University Assessment Advisory Committee, the General Education Council, and the QEP Committee. The purpose of the assessment

and evaluation plan will be to determine whether QEP program goals have been achieved including the impact of curricular and co-curricular interventions on student outcomes, student achievement of critical thinking outcomes, success of the QEP implementation plan, and program impact.

B. Relevant Internal and External Measures to Evaluate the QEP

The assessment and evaluation plan will incorporate direct measures of student achievement of core competency and program learning outcomes. The critical thinking subtests of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) will be administered as pre-tests and post-tests to assess student progression in achieving critical thinking and reasoning skills. The Scale of Intellectual Development (SID) and the Measure of Epistemological Reflection (MER) will be used to assess student progression in cognitive and intellectual development along the dimensions of Perry's model of intellectual and cognitive development. Common course test items, and common course projects and assignments, will be developed by the faculty. The tests, projects, and assignments will be embedded in general education courses to evaluate the effectiveness of critical thinking pedagogies and learning strategies to improve student achievement of critical thinking outcomes and to assess student achievement of intended learning outcomes.

Course syllabus reviews and curriculum mapping will be conducted on an annual basis in order to assess and document the extent to which critical thinking learning outcomes have become saturated across the general education curriculum. The syllabus reviews and curriculum maps also will be used to identify gaps in the curriculum and to identify areas to target for faculty and staff development programs. Course evaluations will be conducted in accordance with University policies and procedures to assess and monitor the effectiveness of the general education courses as critical thinking pedagogies and learning strategies are embedded throughout the core program. Ongoing evaluations of faculty and staff development activities and co-curricular activities will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the faculty development and co-curricular pathways of the QEP.

Process and program impact evaluations will be conducted by external consultants to evaluate implementation of QEP activities and interventions, and faculty, staff, and student engagement in QEP activities. Indirect assessment measures will be administered on a systematic basis. The measures include the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, and the Graduating Student Exit Survey. Surveys and assessment measures for service-learning activities, student living and learning communities, peer mentoring activities, and faculty communities of practice will be developed to provide feedback for planning, program development, and program effectiveness.

C. Internal System for Evaluating the QEP and Monitoring its Progress

The administrative and operational systems and processes for the QEP will be evaluated and monitored in accordance with routine University policies and procedures for systematic review of programs. QEP staff and administrator performance evaluations will be conducted annually, in accordance with University policies and procedures. Budget reviews and related procedural and process reviews will be conducted on an annual basis. In addition, process evaluation surveys will be administered to evaluate and monitor implementation and progress of the QEP. Data will be collected to identify and evaluate engagement, participation, and satisfaction with the curricular review and revision processes, faculty and staff development programs, and co-curricular activities. The results will be used to inform planning and decision-making to ensure successful implementation and sustainability of the Quality Enhancement Plan.

D. How Results of the Evaluation will be Used to Improve Student Learning

The results from the assessment and evaluation plan will be used by the QEP Committee, General Education Council, the University Curriculum Committee, Academic Council, Executive Cabinet, and

the QEP director on an ongoing basis to inform plans for curriculum review and revision, enhancement of pedagogical and learning strategies in critical thinking, faculty and staff development, and enhancement of educationally-enriching co-curricular activities.

Broad Based Involvement of the Norfolk State University Community

A cross-section of the Norfolk State University community was involved in the identification and development of the focus and theme for the Quality Enhancement Plan.

A. Methods Used to Develop the Quality Enhancement Plan

After identifying the QEP focus, theme, and curriculum domain through a participatory, university-wide process, teams of faculty, staff, and students were organized from 2005 through 2007 to conduct a comprehensive literature review of critical thinking pedagogies and learning strategies and to develop implementation strategies during summer institutes and summer academies sponsored by national organizations such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP). From the summer institute teams and the QEP proposal review processes, a QEP proposal writing team was established. The team reviewed and pilot tested assessment and pedagogical strategies, developed implementation strategies in accordance with practices identified in the literature, and prepared the first comprehensive draft of the Quality Enhancement Plan from spring 2006 through fall 2007. The Leadership Team accepted the completed draft copy of the Quality Enhancement Plan in November 2007. After review and feedback by the Leadership Team and the Council of Deans in December 2007, the SACS working group incorporated the feedback and revised the final draft of the Quality Enhancement Plan for review by the Leadership Team. The final draft of the Quality Enhancement Plan was reviewed and approved by the Leadership Team in January 2008.

B. Broad-Based Involvement in the Development of the QEP

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was discussed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs at faculty and staff opening and closing conferences each fall and spring term beginning in spring 2005. The QEP has been discussed frequently in meetings of the Executive Cabinet, Board of Visitors, the Student Government Association, Academic Council, Deans Council, University Curriculum Committee, General Education Council, as well as in divisions, schools, and departments from 2003 through spring 2008.

A campus-wide call for QEP Proposals was issued by the Leadership Team in August 2005. The purpose of the Call for Proposals was to invite faculty, students, administrators, staff, and alumni to participate in the process to identify viable strategies for use in developing a QEP. Seven proposals were submitted by faculty and staff. The proposal writers decided to collaborate and to combine individual proposals, form a QEP Proposal Working Team, and, with the permission of the QEP Committee, collaborated to develop a comprehensive QEP proposal during the 2005-2006 academic year. In fall 2006, the QEP Proposal Working Team conducted a small-scale QEP pilot project, funded by the Southern Education Foundation, to assess the feasibility of the proposed strategies. A draft of the QEP proposal was completed by the Proposal Working Team in October 2007.

The QEP Writing Group presented the draft of the proposal to the General Education Council in November 2007. The Vice President for Academic Affairs presented the proposal to the Deans Council in November 2007. The proposal was reviewed by the NSU Leadership Team and the Board of Visitors in December 2007. The proposal was presented to the campus community during spring opening meetings in January 2008. Feedback from the presentations was used to restructure and finalize the proposal.