

Proposed Quality Enhancement Plan Focus Topic

Proposal due date: Monday, November 15, 2004

Submit electronically to dgoforth@loyno.edu

Or, if you prefer, submit a paper copy to David Estes, 242 Marquette, Box 7

View proposed topics at the QEP Web site—<http://www.loyno.edu/sacs/qep/>

Title and brief description of QEP topic:

Connecting Loyola to New Orleans: Thinking and Writing Critically about New Orleans through the study of Religion, Science, History, Literature, and Information Literacy

This first year seminar would be a one-semester, three-credit course aimed at building a sense of community among students and improving first year learning via the study of the rich and diverse culture and history of New Orleans. Each section will be led by an anchor instructor, and lecturers from multiple disciplines will visit each section throughout the semester. Students will focus on improving skills in three main areas: information literacy, writing, and oral communications. Peer assistants will be on hand to help students complete their writing, research and technology assignments.

Proposal submitted by [optional]:

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Brief explanation of how the topic is “creative and vital to the long-term improvement of student learning” at Loyola:

I. Building a sense of community among first year students

This first-year seminar focuses on the city of New Orleans and emphasizes social constructivism as an exploratory tool for learning. Guest lecturers from different disciplines will speak on topics ranging from ethnic diversity and cultural traditions to architecture and geography. Peer discussions and experiential learning exercises will allow students to make independent, well-informed decisions and effectively present their convictions as they search for their place in the world. Field trips and out-of-class group activities will promote bonding among students in the course.

The first-year seminar, “New Orleans Texts and Contexts,” taught in Fall 2004, offers a model. The seminar consists of linked courses (English T125 and History X194) which explore the cultural, historical, and literary diversity of the city that Loyola calls home. Student Affairs (SA) staff collaborate with the course instructors to conduct experiential learning activities related to the seminar’s major themes. Writing assignments include short researched analytical essays to analytical essays and position papers. Oral communication assignments include class debates and panel discussions.

II. Improving first year learning

A key goal of the seminar will be to develop students' epistemological awareness. Discussions and activities will emphasize strategies for helping students to recognize how they learn as well as what they are learning. To encourage this recognition, students will self-assess through academic journal writing and peer engagement. They will be responsible for leading class discussions, research teams, and oral presentations. All assignments will integrate technological skills, scholarly research (critical and ethical use of information), and writing.

Evidence (or potential sources of evidence) suggesting the need to address this topic [optional]:

- Retention – students enrolled in similar seminar courses are more likely to stay and finish their degree programs
- Learning – students enrolled in similar seminar courses have consistently earned higher GPAs in their respective majors

Current and planned activities at Loyola related to this topic [optional]:

- **First-Year Experience**

The College of Arts and Sciences has a well-established first-year experience program, one that include common readings for incoming students, as well as lectures, events, and activities in early fall related to that reading. Moreover, the College has offered several experimental first-year courses in recent years—courses involving linkages between courses from different disciplines, courses incorporating the first-year reading text into class discussion and writing assignments, and courses involving collaboration between faculty and staff from Student Affairs.

- **Monroe Library instruction and technology services**

Students have access to workshops and individual instruction on finding and using scholarly information properly and ethically, and on using technology to enhance projects and learning development.

- **WAC peer tutoring**

WAC tutors are undergraduates trained to assist others in all phases of the writing process, from planning and pre-writing to revision and editing. WAC tutors are available daily in the Writing Center to assist students with writing assignments. Tutors are trained to help others with thesis statements, organization, paragraph development, and sentence structure. WAC tutors help students recognize strengths and weaknesses in their writing so that writers can begin to spot their own errors and correct them.

WAC also supports first-year programming by providing trained writing tutors to Learning Community instructors whose courses involve significant writing assignments. The Learning Community in the first-year psychology program offers an example of this support. WAC writing tutors serve the LC faculty as peer assistants (PAs) who help the students with a writing assignment that is done in segments and integrated at semester's end. These PAs are assigned to first-year students in Psychology 100 in a ratio of 1 PA to 10 students.

