

### 3. "Fostering Critical Thinking and Writing:

#### Freshman Seminars and Faculty Workshops"

##### Title and Brief Description of QEP Topic:

"Fostering Critical Thinking and Writing: Freshman Seminars and Faculty Workshops"

In disciplines from accounting to zoology, professionals testify that the best prepared employees are those who can think critically and speak and write persuasively. In the years in which our current students will work, the content or information of their jobs—even the basic nature of their employment—will change over and over but their need to make judgments and voice those judgments will not.

At Loyola, through courses in the common curriculum, such as English 122, through our majors, and through the Writing across the Curriculum Program, we have always stressed critical thinking and writing. Our proposal is to build on that emphasis, as well as improve retention and the unity of the common curriculum, by instituting a freshman seminar program.

We thus suggest that to further stress critical thinking and writing skills across the curriculum, the university institute freshman seminars, which can count as one of the student's common curriculum courses, its slot depending on the department of the teacher who offers it. These classes, which students can elect to take during their first semester, will be focused around a common topic (religious intolerance, globalism) or will involve multidisciplinary topics chosen and developed by individual faculty. Each class will enroll fifteen students who will encounter active learning opportunities within the classroom and coordinated events outside of it.

To consider various methods of stressing critical thinking and writing, participating faculty will attend a workshop, for which they will receive a stipend. There they will consider the methodologies for these seminars:

- critical thinking activities
- writing assignments
- oral performance opportunities
- small-group involvements
- information literacy (discussed in coordination with the Monroe Library's Information Literacy Program)

A Co-Curricular Component: Within the seminar period and beyond it, students will also participate with their group and with others in appropriate service learning opportunities, undertaken along with critical reflection and writing assignments that help students analyze these activities. They will also attend lectures and other events that pertain to the class topic. Further co-curricular activities extending beyond the first semester, for which professors will be given funding, will help students maintain contact with a core group as they take other common curriculum courses and enter their majors.

As teachers participate in the training workshops, they will be considering various instructional design models that enhance critical thinking and writing. Their discussions can also focus on the best means of fostering these key skills throughout the common curriculum and within our majors.

**Proposal submitted by:**

Katherine H. Adams, Mary A. McCay, Melanie McKay

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

The freshman seminars will involve students in active instructional methodologies: in writing assignments, in critical thinking activities, in oral performance, in small groups, and in opportunities for co-curricular activities, including service learning. Because the seminar will concern a multidisciplinary theme, it will encourage students to integrate ideas from various courses. Because it will foster an involved group considering questions together, it will engage students as active learners. Because the teacher can serve as an advisor and mentor, it will also help students with their adjustment to the university.

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

Studies suggest that students profit from the diversity of subjects covered within general education, but that overarching themes help them to process and organize this information. Many universities, such as Purdue and the University of Toronto, which report their results through the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience, have found that heightened learning and retention stem from the seminar model's active classroom, co-curricular activities, and connections to faculty. Many researchers, such as Peter Facione of Loyola University Chicago, have especially praised the emphasis on critical thinking that these seminars involve. The freshman seminar will help students to approach subject matter actively and critically and to integrate ideas and approaches from various disciplines while also giving them a "home" on campus.

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

In the College of Arts and Sciences, the development of a first-year experience involving a shared reading has proven the efficacy of shared academic content and activities. The College of Business's mentor programs also testify to the effect of early interaction between faculty and students. Student groups, such as the Loyola Society for Civic Engagement, have demonstrated the students' desire for treatment of academic subject matter in co-curricular events.

## 10. Changing Minds: A Transformative Liberal Education

Proposal due date: Monday, November 15, 2004

Submit electronically to [dgoforth@loyno.edu](mailto: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: Changing Minds: A Transformative Liberal Education.** This proposal targets the core educational mission of Loyola as a Jesuit university in a changing world, and specifically the transformative character of a liberal education in the Jesuit tradition. The core curriculum should be organized around four critical transformations: (1) from information consumers to critical thinkers, (2) from passive learners to engaged learners, (3) from local citizens to global citizens, and (4) from autonomous selves to men and women for others.

**Proposal submitted by [optional]:** .Thomas Smith

**Brief explanation of how the topic is “creative and vital to the long-term improvement of student learning” at Loyola:** This model is creative in that curriculum will be designed from standpoint of desired outcomes that implicate not only mastery of skills and knowledge, but of a more comprehensively conceived "metanoia" that implicates the whole person.

**Evidence (or potential sources of evidence) suggesting the need to address this topic [optional]:** Models of core education that connect knowledge with life (experiential learning, service learning), that make connections between disciplines (interdisciplinarity), and that stress the collaborative and communitarian approach to learning have been shown to produce enhanced learning. Further, globalization and internationalization of curriculum have been prominently featured as the next task of higher education. At Loyola, the Common Curriculum as currently structured does not evidence an overarching structure or strategy keyed to student learning, nor is the university's mission prominent in the core educational experience, except for the presence of substantial hour requirements in Religious Studies and Philosophy.

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

## 15. “Answering the Call to Excellence: Jesuit Education for the Leaders of Tomorrow”

Proposal due date: Monday, November 15, 2004

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**Title and brief description of QEP topic: “Answering the Call to Excellence: Jesuit Education for the Leaders of Tomorrow”**

**One of the distinguishing characteristics of Jesuit education is its concern with the whole person. A Jesuit university is concerned that its graduates acquire not merely material success, or professional competency, but to become excellent human beings. Loyola strives to teach its students not merely how to make a living in life, but rather, how to make their lives worth living. Our concern is with the moral, intellectual, and spiritual development of our students. The focus topic that we propose has a triadic structure.**

**For the moral development of our students, we wish to initiate an analysis and discussion of moral values across the curriculum. This will involve an inquiry into basic concepts and ultimate ends, for example, asking questions about the meaning of justice, the nature of a good human life, as well as the kinds of responsibilities that humans have for others. Loyola has placed a great value on the struggle for social justice; we propose that action for the betterment of society must be guided and informed by a sustained intellectual reflection on fundamental moral concepts.**

**For the intellectual development of our students, we wish to engage our students in a deep reflection on, and inquiry into, the concepts and presuppositions that form the background of their day-to-day lives. Beyond a general inquiry into the history of thought, one way to do this is to hone the critical thinking skills of our students. In an age marked by an explosion of information, students need to acquire the skills necessary to assess and evaluate claims made by others. Loyola will encourage the development of courses and curricula that seek to inculcate in students habits of logical thinking, and that develop their critical reading and writing skills.**

**To promote a deeper discussion of spirituality among our students, we propose an examination of religious values. This will involve an inquiry into the roles that religion has played in the shaping of human culture, including but not limited to a dialogue between faith and reason, theology and science, and religion and politics. An understanding of Islam and other non-Christian religions is of paramount importance for our students. To achieve these ends, Loyola will encourage the development of courses in Islamic thought and culture, and a lecture series devoted to aspects of Middle Eastern and Asian society and culture.**

**Proposal submitted by [optional]:** Mark D. Gossiaux, J.C. Berendzen, Francis P. Coolidge, Stephen Rowntree S.J., Department of Philosophy

**Brief explanation of how the topic is “creative and vital to the long-term improvement of student learning” at Loyola:** From their first appearance in the 16th century, Jesuit colleges and universities have been regarded as centers of excellence. The founding of these schools in cities symbolized the desire of St. Ignatius that education should involve not a withdrawal from the world but rather an active engagement with it. A recommitment to the central theme of Jesuit education—the education of the whole person—with its focus on the moral, intellectual, and spiritual development of its students, will enable Loyola’s graduates to assume leadership roles in the 21st century, and live lives of service to others.

**Evidence (or potential sources of evidence) suggesting the need to address this topic** [optional]: Exit polling from the recent Presidential election indicates that many Americans are quite concerned about the moral values of the country. A reflection on basic moral values and moral responsibility is therefore quite timely. Moreover, ever increasing globalisation makes the world a much smaller place; as events of the last few years have well demonstrated, what happens in distant parts of the world can have dramatic implications for the everyday lives of Americans. Looking into the future, one sees that India and China are poised to become dominant powers over the next century. It is imperative, therefore, that our students attain a deeper understanding of non-Western cultures and religions. Also, the present geopolitical focus on the Middle East and Southeast Asia makes the study of Islam a pressing need. Finally, the rapidly changing labor market requires that students acquire the critical thinking skills needed to adapt to new technologies and new career paths

When one reads the signs of the times, one cannot fail to see the need for deep reflection on moral and spiritual values, and on the cultivation of critical thinking skills. A recommitment to the education of the whole person, a traditional strength of Jesuit education, will prepare our students to assume leadership roles in the world of tomorrow.

**Current and planned activities at Loyola related to this topic** [optional]: --The creation of a center for intercultural study (this could be aptly named “The St. Francis Xavier Center” after the 16th century Jesuit missionary who traveled widely through India and the Far East), which would focus on the study of Middle and Far Eastern culture and religions.

--Focus the efforts of the first-year experience (FYE) towards thematic treatments of moral and religious values.

--The introduction of lecture series dealing with fundamental moral issues and concepts, as well as non-Western thought and culture.

--Course development grants to fund course initiatives in critical thinking and thematic treatments of moral issues across the curriculum.

--Development of faculty workshops to facilitate the introduction of critical thinking methodologies into the classroom.