QEP Proposal Abstracts
November 2008

The QEP Planning Committee is welcoming feedback on all twelve topic proposals that have been posted on our website (http://qep.gmu.edu). Please visit the QEP Café (http://blogs.gmu.edu/qep) to read the full proposals and share your ideas and comments with the Mason community.

**Promoting Student Success through Critical Thinking**
Critical thinking is the essential ability for all students to be successful in the 21st century because of technological, societal, professional, and cultural changes influencing the global community and is an essential element in many of the University’s Strategic Goals for the 2014 Strategic Plan.

- Numerous cross-curricular initiatives already underway at George Mason can be augmented to create a true university-wide Critical Thinking Initiative, including the Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum (CTAC) program.
- Student learning outcomes focused on critical thinking should address interdisciplinary thinking as well as disciplinary thinking, and also focus on leadership and intelligence gained from the co-curriculum, including University Life, University Libraries, and Living Learning Community Initiatives.
- Student success and improved academic challenge at Mason will require institutional commitment to assessment of critical thinking, with data collected from both students and faculty.

**Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience through Research & Creativity**
Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience through Research and Creative Activity directly and powerfully addresses the challenges that face higher education in the coming decades. By participating in undergraduate research and creative activity, students:

- become part of a community of lifelong learners and of the subset of learners within a discipline, generating opportunities to discuss and explore ideas that may be fuzzy in class with peers and with those more advanced in the discipline, including professionals in the community.
- will produce original scholarship by, for example, sharing thoughts of expression in the visual arts, strategies for diplomacy in public affairs, or positing rationales for physical or chemical responses, and thus what often remains unstated – the analytical process – becomes apparent, modeled, shared, challenged, and applied practically in other contexts.
- will have increased interaction with faculty and graduate students as they work together on projects and ultimately present them to their peers.
- learn to think critically about their discipline, examining the key assumptions and understanding the limitations of their work and that of their peers.

**The World as Text: Diverse Communities, Shared Understandings**
This QEP replaces the current Global Understanding requirement of General Education with courses at two levels: new first-year courses, across many disciplines, built around a common text or texts; and an upper-division, globally focused course in the major. Its major premises are:

- General Education touches undergraduates in every discipline; this QEP increases the relevance and importance of its global component by examining basic concepts integral to the gen ed curriculum through the lens of the shared understandings and differences of perspective of our heterogeneous university community.
• The first-year common text courses will center on a literary work, a film, a piece of music, a scientific treatise, or a work of visual art and will use that text to explore a specific academic discipline in the context of at least two human cultures.
• The upper-level courses will integrate global perspectives into a required course in the major, thus producing a contextually grounded and synthetic understanding of the major discipline as it interacts with today’s increasingly international and multicultural society.

Global Engagement at Mason
Mason has an institutional goal as part of its 2014 strategic plan of cultivating a global perspective, emphasizing global roles, promoting global understanding, and articulating and meeting the relevant challenges of globalization including environmental challenges.
• “Global Engagement at Mason” will be a university-wide commitment to incorporate a global perspective throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum.
• Through the implementation of this QEP, Mason will capitalize on its location and its multinational student body to become recognized as a global university, in outreach, research and education, promoting increasing global awareness, understanding and competence among our students and faculty.

Universal Design Education
This QEP focuses on meeting the needs of every student, faculty, staff, and community member through the creation of accessible physical and information environments across the curriculum and co-curriculum.
• Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for designing educational environments that enables all learners to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning.
• Its intent is to reduce barriers for everyone by making products, communications, and the environment more usable by anyone.
• Examples of ways to integrate Universal Design Education include providing: multiple and flexible methods of presentation to give students with diverse learning styles various ways of acquiring information and knowledge; multiple and flexible means of expression to provide diverse students with alternatives for demonstrating what they have learned; and multiple and flexible means of engagement to tap into diverse learners’ interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

Integration of Inquiry-Based Learning
This QEP aims to provide students with the skills they need to become lifelong learners by providing them with opportunities to engage in inquiry-based learning.
• It will help students apply critical thinking, creative, and research-based skills to larger and more complex local and global issues.
• Topic areas that might especially benefit from students’ development of these skills are: global and community problems related to health, climate change, technology, community and culture, conflict, communication, and creativity.
• Inquiry-based learning could be integrated into the curriculum through seminar classes, case-based analyses and discussions, and/or activities that take place outside of the classroom.
Social Entrepreneurship at George Mason University: Everyone a Changemaker
The rapid pace of technological, social, political and organizational change emerging in the early part of this 21st century is coupled with an increasing number of national and global challenges. Innovative, entrepreneurial solutions will be required to address these most intractable problems.

- More emphasis should be placed on actively helping students to apply the knowledge, skills and abilities they gain on campus to the tangible, everyday problems they will face as the leaders of tomorrow.
- Social entrepreneurship at George Mason University emphasizes the connection between people and organizations that apply scholarly knowledge across the disciplines in innovative ways to the world’s most pressing problems.
- This QEP will focus on teaching students the vital skills of critical thinking, problem solving, risk assessment, practical management, leadership and innovation, while simultaneously cultivating a spirit of social responsibility and civic engagement.

Global Learning through Language
This QEP focuses on the belief that the success and competitiveness of Mason students in an increasingly global economy relies upon available opportunities for enhanced foreign language acquisition.

- All students at Mason, regardless of degree program, will gain a competitive edge in the job market by obtaining increased language proficiency through better classroom instruction, variety of languages offered, and language immersion abroad.
- Offering a wider variety of languages, and at higher levels of proficiency, would address the student body’s growing demand for global competency in both language and cultural awareness.

21st Century Classroom
This QEP would allow students to take up to 18 credits without having to pay more tuition and would also include the implementation of an online classroom.

- Major requirement classes would be offered online, eliminating the difficult position that students are placed in when classes that are required for their major are only offered during one semester.
- Online classes would allow students to have a regular weekly course load of attending five classes, while working towards six, one of which would be an online class. These classes could be created by utilizing further applications on the Blackboard Learning Program.
- There would be an orientation for students and faculty to educate them on the functionality of the Blackboard Learning System.
- This QEP has the potential to enhance students’ classroom experiences and to bring students and faculty closer through the use of online communication and technologies.

Integrating the Research Participant Databases
This QEP aims for Mason to be on the cutting edge of research through the integration of all of the Mason undergraduate research participant databases into one single database.

- The integration of databases will streamline our research participation as various departments will have access to a greater research pool.
- A diverse subject pool would make all of Mason’s research stronger and more innovative as more ideas collaborate, which would help us to secure ourselves as leaders in the 21st century in our research.
- This QEP has the potential to further legitimize Mason’s standing as a research university.
**Integrated Critical Communication for the 21st Century (ICC-21)**

This QEP is designed to guide administrators, faculty, and staff at Mason in helping students develop crucial communication skills that will enable them to put their Mason education to use in shaping local and global communities.

- The shaping of any community requires superior communication skills and the ability to critically choose and deftly employ a range of tools and approaches for communication.
- ICC-21 allows departments and programs to design educational experiences that most suit their students’ communication needs.
- This QEP will help students transfer communication skills across modes, across disciplines, and beyond the borders of university coursework.

**Integrated Studies**

This QEP proposal seeks to offer intermediate-level, cross-listed courses, which will give students concise and structured information about two separate fields of study in the one instructional time frame.

- Degree programs that offer concentrations with integrated courses will allow students to prepare themselves for the broad spectrum of issues they might encounter in their future careers.
- Students will develop critical thinking skills as they learn to think across disciplines through enriched learning environments.
- This QEP will address the variations in students’ learning styles and will allow students to have twice the amount of education in half the time by combining two disciplines into one course.