

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Impact Report:

Route 101: Highway to Enhanced Student Learning at Berea College

Berea College's Quality Enhancement Plan identified 17 learning goals focused on knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that equip students to be engaged and effective learners:

- *Effectively organize coursework*
- *Effectively manage time related to coursework*
- *Effectively read assigned texts*
- *Complete assignments appropriately and on time*
- *Seek appropriate assistance in a timely manner*
- *Constructively use instructor feedback to improve*
- *Demonstrate responsibility for learning*
- *Be accountable for my own learning*
- *Be self-motivated to learn and perform*
- *Effectively set goals and priorities related to my coursework*
- *Be an engaged learner*
- *Have adequate study skills*
- *Be an adequate test taker*
- *Be an adequate note taker*
- *Be an adequate manager of stress*
- *Be confident in my academic skills*
- *Understand and cope with personal and family challenges*

The QEP contained two components: (1) A corrective initiative aimed at helping students get off academic probation, and (2) A preventive initiative aimed at helping all students to achieve academic success.

Both initiatives focused on the learning goals listed above, with the understanding, as explained in our QEP, that knowing how to learn is fundamental to successful learning across a student's time in college. Berea College students are from low socioeconomic status homes. The median family annual income is less than \$30,000, and our students come from areas characterized by limited opportunities for high academic preparation. Berea's academic curriculum is rigorous, with results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) placing the College among the most demanding liberal arts colleges. The combination of our mission to serve a diverse and "at risk" population of students and our rigorous academic expectations compelled us to seek ways to enhance our students' learning across the curriculum.

Our QEP identified a number of measures that might change as more students achieved most or all of the seventeen learning goals listed above. These measures, quantitative and qualitative, include:

- increases in first-year students' grade point averages,
- decreases in the number of students placed on academic probation,
- increases in graduation rates,
- increases in graduation rates of students on academic probation,
- increases in the expertise among faculty members for understanding and helping struggling students, and
- increases in the ability of students to take personal responsibility for their learning

No significant changes were made to the original plan of the QEP and the institution maintains strong and continuous support (staff/faculty time and monetary resources) for the programs and activities contained within the QEP initiatives, both corrective and preventive.

The Corrective Initiative

Implementation: The corrective initiative involved inviting students on academic probation to join the course GST 101: *Strategies for Academic Success* first taught in Spring Term, 2004. Of the 664 students who went on academic probation from 2004 through 2009, 373 (study group) took the course and 291 (control group) chose not to. The GST 101 course curriculum was aligned with the QEP learning goals.

Methods of Assessment: Assessment measures included the use of 1) student surveys, 2) graduation rates, 3) in-class pre- and post testing, and 4) faculty feedback.

Assessment Findings:

1) student surveys: We administered a pre/post survey to academic probationers every term, comparing those who took the course to those who did not. Students were first asked to rate the extent to which each of 40 reasons led to their academic probation. The first three reasons, "something about me," "something about others," and "something about my situation" were aimed at understanding to what or whom students attributed their academic difficulties. We were interested in whether the student took direct responsibility for academic probation or placed responsibility/blame with others or with the learning environment ("situation"). The survey also included agreement scales for each of the 17 QEP learning goals (e.g., "I organize my coursework effectively," "I complete assignments fully and on time," "I use instructor feedback to improve"). Open-ended questions on what probationers had learned about their ability to succeed academically were also included on surveys.

Forty-four percent of probationers responded to both the pre and post course surveys. In both pre- and post ratings, probationers who took the GST 101 course most often attributed their failure to something about themselves (e.g., lack of effort, problem solving skills, motivation, study skills, difficulty with stress management, and lack of academic efficacy). Students who did not enroll in the course were more likely to attribute failure to something about their life and learning environment (e.g., life events, family issues, illness, etc.).

Compared to probationers who did not take the GST 101 course, GST101 students made statistically significant positive changes across all the structured ratings of the 17 learning goals. The following six statements reflect the greatest positive change for probationers who took the corrective course:

Rate your level of agreement with the following statements (10=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree):

	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
<i>I seek assistance in a timely manner</i>	5.16	6.28	1.12*
<i>I am confident in my ability to take notes</i>	6.69	7.57	.88*
<i>I manage my time related to coursework completion effectively</i>	5.57	6.42	.85*
<i>I use instructor feedback to improve</i>	6.49	7.34	.85*
<i>I am confident in my study skills</i>	5.93	6.76	.83*
<i>I am confident in my ability to manage stress</i>	5.84	6.64	.80*

***statistically significance at $p < .05$**

From the pre-course survey, probationers who took the GST 101 generally attributed reasons for their lack of academic success to “internal” causes such as:

- Something about me.
- My own motivation/effort and the time I committed to studying.
- My own lack of problem solving skills (talking to teachers, seeking support, meeting academic obligations).
- Lack of effort on my part.
- I didn’t spend the time necessary to do good work.
- Lack of personal college study skills.
- My own lack of problem-solving skills (talking to teachers, seeking support, meeting academic obligations).

Also, those who took GST 101 were more likely to perceive deficits in their own academic efficacy as indicated by their pre- course survey results. For example, GST 101 enrollees rated their agreement with the following statements barely above the neutral point on the agreement scale:

- I seek assistance in a timely manner.
- I manage my time related to coursework completion effectively.
- I am confident in my ability to manage stress.
- I am confident in my study skills.

In contrast, the probationers who did not take the GST 101 course only rated two statements (both “external” causes) above the neutral point as reasons for poor academic performance: “something about my situation” and “life events that got in the way--family issues, illness, relationship problems.” These students also rated their academic skills higher than did the probationers who took the GST 101 course.

From the post surveys, 70% of the probationers who took the corrective course indicated they had changed personally as a result. When asked to describe that change in open-ended comments, students most often mentioned learning to:

- take more responsibility
- study more effectively
- better manage their time
- take more initiative to participate fully in their classes
- ask for help when needed
- feel more motivated and confident.

2) graduation rates: We compared graduation rates of students who were and were not placed on academic probation over the last few years (during the time of the corrective course). Overall, only 38% of probationers graduated compared to 74% of those who never go on probation. However, for academic probationers (N =373) who completed the corrective course, the five-year graduation rate is better:

- Took Corrective Course 42% or 157 students graduated
- Did Not Take Corrective Course 27% or 77 students graduated

3) in-class pre- and post testing: Students enrolled in GST 101 took a pre- and post-test developed by Skip Downing, the author of the common text *On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life*. This test assessed students in eight areas quite similar to the 17 learning goals of the QEP (see table below). According to the assessment guidelines, a score higher than a 63 represents “an area where your choices will usually keep you on course.” The table below illustrates the results from two sections of GST 101 (N = 20) where a higher percentage of students obtained the score of 63 or above after working on these attributes in the class.

	Percent of Students with Score Above 63 (indicating strength area)		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Increase
Accepting Personal Responsibility	35%	45%	10%
Discovering Self-Motivation	25%	50%	25%
Mastering Self-Management	5%	30%	25%
Employing Interdependence	0%	15%	15%
Gaining Self-Awareness	10%	30%	20%
Adopting Lifelong Learning	20%	30%	10%
Developing Emotional Intelligence	5%	10%	5%
Believing in Myself	20%	35%	15%

4) faculty feedback: Because teaching GST 101 was also intended to provide for faculty development, we asked participating faculty to respond to the following question: How has teaching GST 101 changed or affected your teaching and advising in the other courses you teach? All faculty instructors gave positive examples of how teaching GST 101 had helped them in their teaching and advising within and beyond GST 101. They mentioned incorporating skill-building (note-taking, studying, etc.) into the content of their courses, checking more often on what the students are understanding, being more patient, and spending more time listening. The following two quotations from faculty illustrate the content and tone of the comments.

- *“I now try to pay more attention to those students who demonstrate difficulty early on. More one-on-one meetings; more emphasis on correction. As for advising, I am more cautious with students who are ambitious regarding course load and co-curricular activities.”*

- *“I have included suggestions for effective study strategies in my course syllabi, integrated components of active listening in all my courses. I have gained greater insights and motivation to analyze my pedagogical approach in a more scholarly manner. The course has enabled me to continue to emphasize effective strategies in content-related courses as well as those in general education.”*

Faculty instructors for GST 101 were surveyed again during spring semester of 2011 and asked to rate the extent to which their experience had helped them: 1) be a better teacher overall, 2) recognize what students need to succeed, 3) become a more effective advisor, and 4) improve students' learning skills. The highest rated statement was “help become a more effective advisor to students” followed by “recognize what students need to succeed.” All statements were positively rated, on average. Faculty instructors also offered comments on the impact the experience had on their teaching. Two such comments are as follows:

- *“I learned that one of the most difficult things for students to do is to tell the teacher when they do not understand. Since teaching GST 101, I've incorporated small group conversations. Students tell each other what they don't understand then share it with the class.”*
- *“I've learned how important it is to first-generation students and students who are not thriving to have interactive learning experiences.”*

Both qualitative and quantitative measures point to the success of GST 101 as a valuable intervention tool for students on probation. We plan to continue offering the course to academic probationers. The second part of our QEP was intended to reduce the number of students on probation.

The Preventive Initiative

Background: The preventive element of the QEP was conceived as a parallel program to the GST 101 corrective course but instead of working with students after they have demonstrated poor performance, it focused on cultivating academic success in the first year of college. The QEP plan envisioned a course, seminar, or series of workshops, and a year of intensive planning was conducted by a group of faculty, staff, and students. This group, the First-Year Initiative (FYI) Planning Team, worked throughout the 2006-07 academic year (Year 1) to: 1) study national, regional, and local literature/data and recommend initiatives to improve the success of Berea College students, 2) attend relevant conferences, 3) visit institutions with notable first-year programs, and 4) review the results of a survey that asked faculty members to consider students in the top, middle, and lower third of their classes and rate the extent to which each group needed to improve on each of the 17 QEP learning goals. From the faculty survey, the Planning Team learned that “Effectively managing time related to coursework completion” was a top rated area for needed improvement for both first-year and senior students regardless of their performance. Faculty rated their poorest performing senior students as needing most improvement in “seeking appropriate assistance in a timely manner.” Faculty also rated “managing stress” as an area of needed improvement, primarily for top performing students.

During Year 1, the FYI team also participated in the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) Project through the University of South Carolina's National Policy Center on the First Year of College. This project provided a structure for conducting a comprehensive self-study or internal audit of institutional policies and practices related to the first year of college. Evaluations were made on multiple performance indicators related to each of nine Foundational Dimensions critical to first-year student success. Our FoE internal audit focused the FYI team on the critical roles of advisors, instructors, and peer leaders in helping students learn to be successful.

Using the results of the faculty survey, external research, the FoE internal audit, and a study of best practices, the First-Year Initiative (FYI) committee generated a list of 12 possible core proposals to increase student success and engagement. The following four proposals have already been implemented: 1) a full-time position for Coordinator of First-Year Experiences was created; 2) the College's Early Intervention Program was bolstered by providing clearer avenues and technology applications to identify and address underperforming students' needs; 3) a team of faculty, staff, and students was formed to begin working to improve first-year experiences by providing a course registration preference system, creating stronger links between Residence Life and Academic Services, and enhancing faculty and staff development related to the first-year experience; and, 4) a preventive first-year initiative based on the 17 QEP learning goals was developed and implemented.

Implementation: To begin the preventive initiative, the group proposed that particular curricular elements be added to an existing first-year course and that a peer leadership program be established. The first-year general education course *Writing Seminar I: Critical Thinking in the Liberal Arts (GSTR 110)* required of all new Berea students was selected as the focus course for the initiative. Student success teams comprised by the course instructor, a staff member, and a peer leader were formed to deliver the curriculum. The pilot program, launched in academic year 2007-08 (Year 2), paired cohorts of 15 freshmen in GSTR 110 classes with a student success team. Seven sections of GSTR 110 were selected as pilot courses with 109 students participating in the initial pilot (approximately one quarter of the entering class). The program included an academic and personal skills laboratory to help students focus on important transitional issues of engagement, personal mastery, and academic and personal skill building. Initially, students, unaware of the pilot, self-selected into one of these course sections based only on their interest in the topic of the section, identical to the registration process for all students.

Students participating in the pilot program spent three course hours per week dedicated to the traditional content of GSTR 110 (writing, critical thinking, research, reasoning, etc.). One additional hour per week was dedicated to the academic success lab called Academic Connections, Engagement & Success (ACES). The ACES lab focused on six aspects connected to first-year success: 1) skill/ability development, 2) habits of mind, 3) engagement, 4) personal discovery, 5) relationships, and 6) community involvement. Students also explored issues of personal responsibility, self-management, lifelong learning, and self-awareness. Guided by the results of a faculty survey asking instructors to rate the need for student improvement on the 17 QEP learning goals, the one additional hour per week also focused on improving concrete student success skills such as time-management, study skills, note-taking, test-taking, goal-setting, and stress

management and on attitudinal and behavioral factors critical to student success (e.g., accepting personal responsibility and seeking help in a timely manner).

Methods of Assessment: Assessment of the initial pilot included pre- and post-surveys administered to all participants (students, faculty, staff, and peer leaders), listening projects with subsets of participants, and collection of institutional data including high school grades, ACT/SAT scores, fall and spring term grades, enrollment patterns, and other common indicators of successful transition and engagement in college. Approximately 95% of the initial cohort of ACES students had entered college directly upon graduation from high school and 64% were first-generation students with neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree.

Initial Assessment Findings: For the 2007-08 ACES cohort, pre- and post-term assessment of the 17 QEP learning goals revealed only "being an adequate test-taker" as having changed significantly over the fall term. During that term, no other learning goal revealed any statistically significant change. On average (based on a seven-point Likert scale), ACES students tended to rate themselves as needing little improvement in most areas except reading, time management, and study skills.

Next Steps: For 2008-09 (Year 3 of the QEP) a revised pilot was created with the QEP curriculum delivered five sections of GSTR 110 and five sections of introductory-level discipline-based courses (Agriculture, Appalachian Studies, Biology, Music, and Psychology). This mixed model grew out of a need to explore sustainable delivery models taking into account various institutional constraints such as enrollment issues, faculty teaching and advising loads, space in the curriculum for developmental and skill-building content, and first-year student interests. All ten sections in the second pilot employed the student success teams and training was enhanced with peer leaders participating in a full day's training prior to the start of orientation and ongoing meetings throughout the term on peer leadership and student development issues. Student success content (e.g., transitioning to college, personal and skill development, motivation and goal identification/clarification) was again delivered through the ACES lab led by the staff mentor, faculty/advisor, or both. A post-term assessment of the 17 QEP learning goals was also used with the 2008-09 ACES cohort. Results were very similar to those from the 2007-08 pilot post-term assessment.

In academic year 2009-10 (Year 4), we continued to offer 10 sections of the course using the mixed delivery model of the second pilot but without the ACES lab and its highly structured curriculum. Instead, faculty advisors/instructors were given more flexibility to tailor the ACES curriculum to the needs of their particular students. Two factors led to this change: 1) faculty advisors strongly endorsed the advisor in the classroom model as an arrangement that allowed them to more effectively understand and address the needs of their advisees, and 2) GSTR 110 course objectives are extremely time-intensive for both students and instructors. A more flexible approach was thought to maximize the potential benefits of the pilot model. Based on survey data and other feedback, we also determined that the inclusion of a staff member, while valued by students, was not essential to program effectiveness. We found strong support for the program in general and particularly for the instructor/advisor pairing and for peer leaders.

Assessment Findings: Over these three years we compared ACES and non-ACES students on a number of student success indicators such as grades, GSTR 110 learning

goals, Dean's list, academic probation, and freshman-to-sophomore retention. There were mixed results across the years. (See table below.) Compared to non-ACES students, ACES students had a higher average college GPA in the second two years of the pilot. In year two, ACES students were also more likely to be on the Dean's list and were retained at higher rates though none of these differences was statistically significant.

We also compared first-generation ACES students to those not in ACES finding only one marginally significant difference between the groups on first-term GPA (2.84 for ACES versus 2.72 for Non ACES).

Outcome Measures	Fall Term Entering First-Year and Transfer Students					
	2007 (N = 441)		2008 (N = 439)		2009 (N = 420)	
	ACES (N = 109)	Non-ACES (N = 332)	ACES (N = 143)	Non-ACES (N = 296)	Instructor Advisor (N = 133)	Instructor NOT Advisor (N = 287)
On Academic Probation*	14.7%	14.4%	19.6%	20.3%	18.8%	18.8%
1st Term GPA	2.84	2.80	2.96	2.86	2.91	2.79
2nd Term GPA	2.80	2.88	2.93	2.84	2.86	2.79
On Dean's List** at least one term of First Year	29.4%	25.8%	31.5%	27.4%	26.3%	26.8%
1st-to-2nd Year Retention	73.4%	78.9%	84.6%	80.1%	78.9%	79.1%

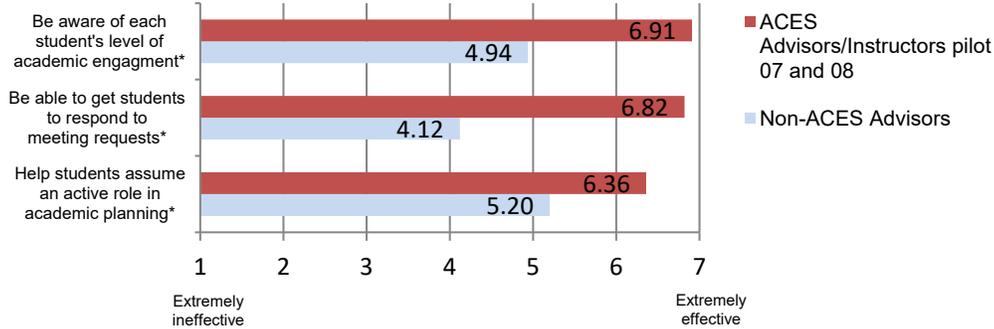
*Student was on academic probation either for the 2nd term of attendance or for their 3rd term of attendance or both.

**Requires a 3.2 GPA or higher for a minimum of 4 full courses or the equivalent.

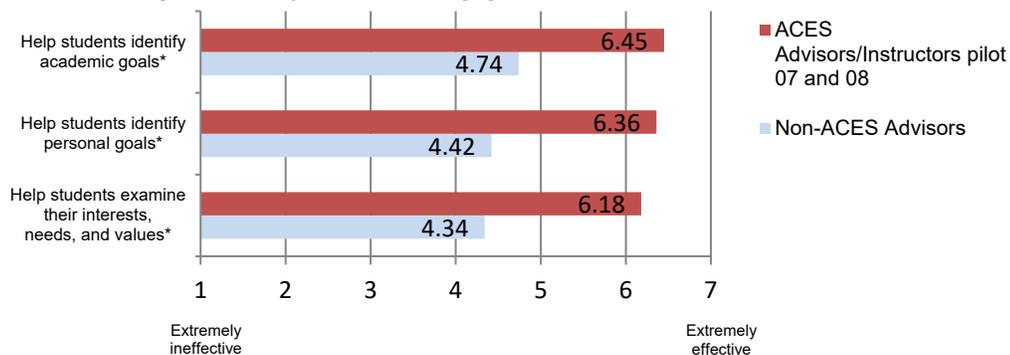
The same outcome measures were compared for students whose advisor was also the course instructor with those who were not. Results were equivocal and not statistically significant. We will continue to study program impact on student learning as the first-year advising model with enhanced training for advisors and peer mentors is fully implemented.

One outcome of our QEP has been to focus our attention on academic advising for first-year students. Based on survey, qualitative, and anecdotal feedback from students and advisors, we conducted a first-year advisor survey in spring 2009 to examine advising experiences and, in particular, to compare the experiences of those who had advised using one of the piloted ACES models to those advising under the prevalent existing model. Forty-six faculty advisors responded to the survey, 11 of whom had participated in the ACES pilot model. Faculty advisors under both models placed similarly high value on getting to know their advisees. However, in nearly all cases, faculty who advised under the ACES pilot model reported feeling significantly more connected to their advisees and better able to assist them. While all advisors reported preferring at least two contact hours per week outside of class with their advisees, ACES advisors reported having had significantly more contact with advisees outside the classroom. The two following graphs illustrate that ACES advisors also rated several other items on the survey significantly higher than did non-ACES advisors (* denotes statistical significance).

Ability to encourage students to take responsibility for their own education



Ability to encourage students to take responsibility for defining goals



Future Steps Based on Findings: During Year 4 significant institutional attention was given to reviewing QEP assessment data and holding conversations with faculty, staff, and administration to evaluate possible full implementation scenarios. During this time we continued to pilot and expand the advisor-in-the-classroom model. In academic year 2010-2011 (Year 5), more than 80% of incoming first-year students were placed in a course where the instructor was also their advisor. Full implementation is planned for academic year 2011. Based on our review of national literature and best practice and on the outcomes of our pilot projects, the most significant result of the preventive part of our QEP has been to change institutional practice in academic advising for first-year students. As noted in the academic advisors' survey, faculty believe that their ability to assist students in a number of key areas related to academic achievement is enhanced when they teach a cohort of students who are also their advisees. Beginning in fall 2011, all incoming first-year students will be enrolled in a section of GSTR 110 with an instructor who is also their academic advisor. Instead of implementing the prescriptive first-year curriculum piloted in the first two years, advisors/instructors will be provided with information on and trained in QEP learning goals, resources and other pertinent materials, allowing them to focus their efforts on the most pressing needs of their first-year students/advisees.

The emphasis on the role of peer leaders has increased and beginning in Fall Term 2011, each GSTR 110 course section will have a peer leader selected by the GSTR 110 professor/advisor and the First-Year Advisory Team. These peer leaders will begin working with students during the fall orientation week and continue throughout the term serving as teaching assistants trained to help students develop as writers and learners and in assisting students with self-management skills, academic planning, and providing academic support. Peer leaders will be trained and supervised by faculty/advisors, the faculty coordinator of GSTR 110, and the Coordinator of the First-Year Experience.

Berea College's evaluation of academic advisors has always included questions related to some of the QEP learning goals and such evaluations are routinely administered as part of probationary, tenure, and promotion reviews. Proposals are now being developed to evaluate all advisors annually since all first-year students will have had their advisor as an instructor. Relevant QEP learning goals will be incorporated into those evaluations providing a means of assessing progress on these goals and keeping faculty advisors focused on them.

Summary

The corrective course element of our QEP, GST 101 has helped students get off academic probation and graduate at higher rates than probationers who did not take the course. It has also served as useful faculty development for those teaching the course in ways that transfer to their teaching in other courses. We plan to continue offering GST101 to all students on academic probation. Our preventive initiative has led to a restructuring of our first-year experience so that all students are advised by one of their GSTR 110 instructors and those instructor/advisors are provided with resources designed to enhance student success. This model will be fully implemented in fall 2011 and will include trained peer leaders in each course section.

The institution consistently provided strong support to all QEP activities by providing for dozens of faculty/advisors, staff, and peer leaders involved in both initiatives and by providing significant staff time to support all assessments (tests, surveys, outcome measure collection). The QEP Leadership Team, composed of faculty, staff, and administrators, met monthly throughout the five year project to provide oversight and guidance to those implementing the initiatives (and to do on-going assessment).

Our QEP initiatives have informed a number of other Berea programs. For example, QEP findings informed the work of a new grant supported project to identify and cultivate first-year students as emerging scholars. Going forward, we will continue to assess QEP learning goals and monitor selected outcome measures (graduation rate, Dean's list, academic probations, and grade point averages) to evaluate effectiveness of both the corrective and preventive QEP initiatives. Perhaps most important, a large percentage of Berea faculty are now oriented to focus on student preparation. Thus, our QEP has resulted not only in greater retention for students on probation but first-year curricular initiatives that have improved advising and first-year curriculum for all students.