QEP Prospectus Draft

This document represents the research and discussions of the QEP Development Committee from February 2015 to present. This document and the QEP project itself will continue to be developed throughout the 2016-17 academic year. Updates will be posted to the 2017 QEP website monthly.

September 12, 2016

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I. Executive Summary:

In 2015, the University of Louisville established the QEP Development Committee in order to research, propose and prepare with campus colleagues a QEP proposal as part of the institution’s commitment to the reaffirmation process for SACS-COC to be completed in early 2017. The QEP is a component of accreditation focused on “learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution.” SACS requires that each institution develop a QEP “through a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment” (SACS COC, 2011).

Our UofL QEP Development Committee is composed of faculty, staff and student members from units across campus (complete roster) is co-chaired by Riaan van Zyl, associate dean for research in the Kent School of Social Work, and Patty Payette, director of i2a and senior associate director of the Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning. In early 2016, the committee began meeting to examine and analyze university data with a focus on the specific hurdles faced by many undergraduate students: navigating the challenges of the second year and successfully transitioning into the third year, which appears to be a moment of critical weakness in the university’s persistence plans. Although improved retention is one of the expected outcomes of the new QEP, the project will center upon enhancing the learning and the learning environment, and its subjects will be pre-unit and undecided students whose struggles are evident in second-year performance data.

The QEP Development Committee identified a troubling persistence pattern in our second-year undergraduate students: there is an attrition gap between the second and third year of undergraduate study, particularly for our exploratory students. At UofL, we use the term “exploratory” to identify students: 1) who have not declared a major (“undecided”); or 2) who have not earned admittance to the academic unit that shelters the program of their choice (“pre-unit”). Pre-unit students are admitted to the College of Arts and Sciences (A&S) and advised in our Exploratory Division alongside undecided students. Undecided students are housed in their own college. The incoming class, 2011 housed 76% undecided students in the A &S, 15% in College of Business, and 9% in Speed School.

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1 A 2012 internal study conducted by Institutional Effectiveness examined the progression of the University’s 2011 Graduation Rate Survey (GRS) cohort. This study revealed noticeable differences between the three subgroups (declared majors, undecided majors, and pre-unit majors), from their admissions credentials, compared to their academic performance at the institution. Pre-unit students had a higher attrition rate than the other two subgroups and exhibited a lower grade point average and hours earned after each of the first two years at the institution.
Research on the subset of “exploratory” students demonstrates that the typical challenges around “academic fit” and satisfaction in the second year can be exacerbated for students who have not yet clarified a meaningful academic course of action, including declaring a suitable major (Tobolowski, 2008, Cuseo, 2012).

Our institutional data showed that exploratory students had a higher attrition rate, earned a lower grade point average and accumulated fewer hours earned after each of the first two years at the institution than our declared students. We note that nearly 50% of Arts and Sciences students enter our institution each year standing to benefit from a structured learning opportunity in order to enhance their ability to thrive academically, to discover an appropriate home at the University, and to persist through critical transition points and challenges of the second year and beyond.

The QEP initiative is a project with a 5-year span to design, implement and assess a 3-credit seminar course focused on academic and personal development of exploratory students.

A central goal of the seminar is to help students deepen their academic skills and explore the alignment of their majors, career plans, and personal strengths. The course will guide students to develop habits of critical thinking, to identify and practice methods of intellectual inquiry, and to find and evaluate information in reading and research effectively in academic contexts and to transfer these skills into other domains of their lives, including personal decision-making.

The QEP course will be offered as an elective seminar, to be offered through the Department of Counseling and Human Development, enrolling 20 students per section. We anticipate offering no more than 11 sections in both fall and spring semesters from 2018 through 2021, with relevant assessment and revision of the seminar occurring each year, leading to the conclusion of our initiative and reporting our findings in a Fifth Year Impact report to SACS in 2022. In line with SACS expectations, a demonstration of effective impact should lead to the eventual creation of a permanent course offering to enhance student learning.

Recruitment of faculty to develop and teach the new seminars will begin in fall 2017, one goal being to include broad representation of the university’s undergraduate units. Faculty committing to the project will be paid at x-pay rates outside their annual workload plan. Integrated into the seminar activities and assessments will be individualized academic and career advising delivered by relevant staff on campus. The seminar curriculum and QEP assessment plan are under development to be submitted in the SACS proposal in early 2017.

II. Process Used to Develop the QEP:

Evidence of the involvement of all appropriate campus constituencies (providing support for compliance with CS 3.3.2 “includes a broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development...of the QEP”)

From the early inception of the QEP Development Committee, and continuing throughout the development process, we have been committed to engaging a wide array of campus populations in the QEP conversation. SACS expects that the selection of the QEP topic and the contour of
the project “includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP.” (SACS principle 2.12).

Early Concept Development

With these expectations in mind, the QEP Development Committee was launched with faculty representatives from all 11 academic schools and colleges; 2 representatives from the student body; representatives from our Faculty Senate and Staff Senate, and an array of staff members from programs and offices across campus. The membership of the group was modified each semester as the topic took shape and the co-chairs began to tap the expertise of individuals on campus whose work and interests dovetailed with the emerging QEP theme. For a complete list of QEP Development Committee individuals, see Appendix A.

To aid the functioning of the Committee’s activities, three subcommittees were formed to each develop specific aspects of the project: Assessment and Measures, Best Practices in Engagement, and University Initiatives.

Throughout spring 2015 semester, this group examined institutional data, considered university priorities, reviewed best practices and then determined that enhancement in our undergraduate student experience needed to focus on aiding those students who were struggling in the second year, including many of who were not able successful transition to the third year. The QEP Development Committee completed a QEP Report and Recommendations document in April 2015 that recommended our QEP center upon the design and assessment of a credit-bearing seminar for second-year students at UofL to support the academic and personal development of students who were deemed “at risk” for thriving at our institution and persisting to graduation. This 2015 Report and Recommendation document was shared with the university’s Reaccreditation Leadership Team who approved of the emerging direction for the QEP and authorized the committee to flesh out a proposal to be shared with the campus community in the 2015-2016 academic year.

The QEP Development Committee met twice a month during the 2015-2016 academic year to further development the goals and structure of a second-year seminar to share with campus constituencies. The make-up of the committee was modified over the course of year as the project topic came into focus and individuals have either elected to step down, or been invited to join the group, in order to bring those with the appropriate expertise and experience into the planning process.

During the fall 2015 semester, the provost asked the QEP Development Committee to develop three interventions, each requiring varying degrees of resource intensity, of the proposed intervention for second-year students for review. After two months of research and writing, each subcommittee presented its models for a seminar format to a campus group that included directors from student affairs, academic advising and undergraduate affairs. Based on the early feedback of this group, and drawing from these models, the QEP Development Committee articulated 3 variations of the QEP seminar to share with the provost and the Strategic Planning Implementation Group (SPIG) in early 2016.

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Preliminary Proposal Development

In the spring 2016 semester, Provost Pinto and the SPIG signed off on the QEP Development Committee’s recommendation that our campus propose to SACS a 3-credit seminar for second year students to enhance students’ abilities to align academic, major and career goals. An early 24-page QEP proposal was completed in March 2016 and posted on the new QEP website, along with an online form to solicit feedback.

During the spring 2016 semester, presentations (followed by discussion) about the proposed QEP project were given to the Faculty Assembly of the College of Arts and Sciences, to the Undergraduate Council, to Council of Career Advisors, and to the Reaffirmation Leadership Team and the meeting of the university’s associate deans. Modifications to the plan were made in response to the concerns and issues voiced by these groups.

Patty Payette, co-chair of the QEP Development Committee, and Nisha Gupta, specialist for faculty development and lead researcher for the QEP best practices attended the Sophomore Success Institute offered by the National Resource Center for First-Year Experiences and Students in Transition in April, 2016 and brought back insights, ideas and research-based practices which the QEP Development Committee wove into the emerging proposal.

In summer 2016, members of the QEP Development Committee continued to deepen the research on the chosen topic and articulated the outcomes and goals of the new seminar with input from key campus partners. Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Affairs, Dale Billingsley, presented a short version of the most current thinking about the QEP to the College Arts and Sciences chairs, who provided key feedback and approval of the modified emerging proposal. Sophomore year scholar Dr. Molly Schaller from the University of Dayton came to campus on June 23-24 to deliver a presentation about the research on second year students and consult with QEP leaders and contributors about our project in development.

The QEP Development Committee used the summer months to develop the longer QEP prospectus document in anticipation of garnering feedback from campus constituents throughout Fall 2016 semester. The feedback plan with various groups across campus is under development; for a list of the individuals and groups who are part of our draft feedback plan.

III. Identification of the Topic:

In accordance with SACS’ expectation that the identification of a QEP topic emerge from looking closely at “issues centered on student learning where shared interests, concerns, and aspirations have already surfaced or where data have already been collected and analyzed,” the Committee began to delve into existing university data sets that can illuminate the undergraduate student experience (SACS handbook, 43).

The institutional reports that were reviewed by the Assessment Subcommittee of the QEP Development Committee represented data collected from our undergraduate students and faculty using both nationally recognized and locally created assessment instruments. Examples of nationally recognized reports reviewed by this committee are the National Survey of Student...
Engagement (NSSE), the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program’s (CIRP) Freshman Survey. Examples of institutional specific reporting included student learning data from the university-wide General Education assessment process; the institution’s graduating senior survey; the institution’s retention, persistence, and graduation trends data; and a number of ad hoc studies focused on the profiling and institutional progression of various student populations conducted by institutional effectiveness. Various themes were generated from the data and include the following: (1) enhancing Student and Faculty interaction, (2) enhancing High Impact Practices, (3) enhancing students’ civic mindedness, and (4) enhancing student assumptions and point-of-view as they related to cultural diversity.

The Assessment subcommittee noted two additional observations: (1) the institution lacks data on second and third year students; and (2) there is very little support for regarding issues of student persistence beyond the second year. In other words, although the institution has robust data reporting structures for first-year and senior students, the ability to speak on behalf of the sophomore and junior experiences of students is clearly missing. This deficiency impacts the university’s ability to articulate data-driven decisions to enhancing student experiences in these crucial transitional stages between the first and final year.

Over the past ten years, UofL has invested in various first year programming and initiatives to support students’ ability and confidence in transitioning into the university and to address the first year retention of our students. Data from national surveys and retention trends helped structured and operationalize an approach in working with incoming and first year students. In looking beyond the first year, the committee members were unable to identify specific support programs or initiatives specifically addressing the second year experience.

The QEP Development Committee identified a troubling pattern in our second year undergraduate students: there is an attrition gap between the second and third year of undergraduate study, particularly for our exploratory students. At UofL, we use the term “exploratory” to identify students who have not declared a major (“undecided”) or who have not earned admittance to the program of their choice (“pre-unit”). These students are admitted to the College of Arts and Sciences and housed in our Exploratory Division with undecided students.

One of the revealing data sets about the student experience at UofL comes from a 2012 internal study conducted by Institutional Effectiveness that examined the progression of the University’s 2011 Graduation Rate Survey (GRS) cohort. This study profiled and tracked the entire GRS cohort in three subgroups: declared students, undecided students, and pre-unit students. This study revealed noticeable differences between the three subgroups in their admissions credentials\(^2\) to their academic performance\(^3\) at the institution.

Pre-unit students had a higher attrition rate than the other two subgroups and exhibited a lower grade point average and hours earned after each of the first two years at the institution. For

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\(^2\) Examples of admission credentials/metrics include HS GPA, ACT composite score, and credits earned prior to their first semester at UofL.

\(^3\) Examples of academic performance indicators include 1\(^{st}\) semester GPA, 1\(^{st}\) semester hours earned, 1\(^{st}\) year GPA, 1\(^{st}\) year hours earned, retention at the institution, retention within the unit.

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example, 1,450 GRS students entered the College of Arts and Sciences in the fall of 2011. 846 students entered the College of Arts and Sciences as declared majors, while 227 students were pre-unit and 377 students were undecided. After two years, 561 (66%) of the entering declared majors, 238 (63%) of the undecided students, and 125 (55%) of the pre-unit students enrolled for a third fall term. The percent of entering student with declared majors, persisting into their third year (66%) is higher than those who enter the institution as pre-unit students ($z=6.277$, $p=.001$).

Further analysis conducted on more recent entering GRS pre-unit students gleaned similar incoming profiles, academic performance trends, and third year attrition rates in comparison to declared majors within the College of Arts and Sciences (A&S). Within the entering GRS cohort for A&S, the range for these three subgroups has remained consistent. In 2014, A&S entering GRS cohort was 1,493, where 23%, or 348 incoming A&S students were designated as pre-unit students and an additional 24%, or 363 incoming A&S students for that same year entered the institution as an undecided major. This means that 48% (711) of all incoming A&S students are designated as exploratory students while 52% of incoming A&S students have indicated an intended major.4

These data suggest a large population (nearly 50% of incoming A&S students) of students entering our institution each year stand to benefit from a structured learning opportunity in order to enhance their ability to thrive academically, to discover an appropriate disciplinary home at the University, and to persist through critical transition points and challenges of the second year and beyond. Some of the characteristics of the “undecided” and “pre-unit” students include: first generation college students, students of color, low SE status, and lower pre-college preparation in their high school experience (Beggs, 2008, Leppel, 2001, Rigali-Oiler, 2013). These characteristics have been long identified as compounding factors that put students “at risk” for college success.

As the Committee began to articulate this central thrust of the QEP on our students’ experiences in the second year—and how we, as an institution, might address the notable attrition and learning gap experienced by our exploratory students between the second and third year—we concomitantly began to identify and study the existing programs, efforts, and initiatives on our campus that could inform and align with our QEP.

The director of the Career Development Center, Trey Lewis, and the director of our Exploratory Team that advises exploratory students, Katie Adamchik, were added to the QEP Development Committee in Fall 2015 in order to ensure that our QEP planning could be strongly aligned with the mission and activities currently offered by Trey and Katie’s respective programs.

The Career Development Center (CDC)

The mission of our institution’s CDC centers around supporting students in developing self-knowledge related to career choice and work performance; obtaining information to aid career and educational planning; selecting suitable academic programs that optimize employment

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4 In a typical fall semester (2013, 2014, & 2015), more than 1,700 exploratory students are actively enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences.

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options; taking responsibility for developing career decisions, graduate/professional school plans, employment plans and/or job search competencies, among other goals.

These CDC’s goals overlap with our QEP focus, therefore we will work closely and regularly with the CDC team throughout the QEP development process to leverage their expertise in articulating QEP outcomes, developing our literature review, and vetting career-related assessment tools and advising approaches that fit with our institutional culture. Some of the QEP assessments under consideration were suggested by the CDC, including: Cardinal Career Trek, On-site Informational Interviewing, Heart+Head=Hustle, MBTI Full Report, and Strong Interest Inventory.

Exploratory Programs

In conjunction with the university’s and college’s advising practices, the A&S Exploratory Division provides individualized guidance to support students in the thoughtful exploration of education plans that meet their academic and career goals. Through exploratory advising offered by Katie Adamchik and her team of advisors, students are guided to: assess their strengths, interests, and skills to select an appropriate major; utilize campus and academic support services to reach their academic goals; and transition to their academic program of choice.

All undecided and pre-unit students are required to use these advising services at least once a semester. Ongoing conversations between the Exploratory advising team and those working on the QEP have enriched the planning process. The Exploratory Advising Team have provided rich data about the exploratory population at our institution and become active partners in shaping our QEP intervention for these students. The Exploratory team has affirmed their commitment to assisting with the design and implementation of the QEP and are launching new programs for exploratory students that complement our QEP emphasis. These programs include:

- Designated Gen 101 sections for undecided students
- Gen 201 section in spring 2017 that is tied to a new Exploring Majors and Career Living-Learning Community.
- Operation: Declare a Major email campaign as part of the Exploratory Success Plan initiative

The ways in which our emerging QEP intersected with the other institutional efforts and priorities listed below signaled to the QEP Development Committee that our emerging QEP emphasis was poised to be a timely, vital, and meaningful addition to our campus learning environment.

Gen 201: Career- Decision Making

This is 1-credit hour course supports students who need to intentionally explore their career and/or major paths. The course is co-taught by advisors and career coaches. While the course is targeted at second year students, it is open to all students. Typically, two sections of the course with capacity of 25 are offered both fall and spring semesters. For the past three years, the sections have filled to capacity.
This course seeks to guide students through the thoughtful exploration and selection of academic and career plans. The goals of the course are for students to develop an understanding of the career development process, an understanding of themselves related to career, and an understanding of the tools and materials needed in career decision making. A current research project is underway to examine students completing GEN 201 and their academic plan in the semester immediately following the course.

The QEP Development Committee views Gen 201 as a promising practice to inform our design of the proposed QEP seminar. About half the students enrolled in Gen 201 are first-year students and the other half are second year students; almost 60% the students in Gen 201 fall under the exploratory designation.

The QEP seminar will be clearly focused to support second-year exploratory students and the 3-credit model will allow for more depth of engagement with the student; will include a central focus on academic inquiry and inquiry into the self, decision making, and self-efficacy. Given the research supporting the role that faculty-student interaction plays in student success and persistence married with the need to help exploratory students connect their thinking about self-discovery and major/career path, using Gen 201 as complimentary foundation will be crucial for the design and thinking of the QEP Seminar.

ECPY 397: Thriving in College and Beyond

This course was launched as a pilot offering in Fall 2014 for 20 students by Dr. Nora Scobie. The target population was second year students. Dr. Scobie’s course grew out of her dissertation research interests and academic advising experiences with students. The course, targeted at second-year students, included goals aimed at helping students identify their strengths and learning styles to make real world connections and meaningful choices in college. The emphasis was on academic engagement, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being to help students navigate life transitions. Student Learning Outcomes included:

- Develop skills necessary to build resiliency.
- Identify resources to make informed choices.
- Be knowledgeable about the experiential learning process.
- Understand the processes that enhance individual learning.
- Learn to maximize strengths.
- Apply strengths to real world scenarios.
- Develop critical thinking skills.

Students valued assessment opportunities that helped them identify their strengths (StrengthsQuest and Learning Styles Inventory), provided them opportunities to self-reflect (ongoing journaling and final reflection paper), and cultivated their ability to overcome “controlled” disruptions or to demonstrate/practice resilience (in group presentation and The Resilience Workbook). After the completion of the course, based on both the course evaluation
and informal follow-up by the instructor, students communicated they were more self-aware of their abilities and academic interest as well as indicating a need to have a course like this early on in their academic career. The general sense from the instructor was that students overall had a better sense of where they belong and where they wanted to go.

Dr. Scobie presented to the QEP Development Committee in October 2015 about this course and the group felt that many of its components could productively inform the QEP in development. Although the course was not offered beyond that initial pilot, the course activities and the engagement with the students who took this course indicates that it is a promising resource for the design of the QEP Seminar.

**Trio Student Support Services**

TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) is committed to helping low-income, first-generation college students and students with disabilities achieve a bachelor’s degree. The program’s mission is to increase retention and graduation rates by offering academic, financial, and personal support within a supportive institutional climate. The program chief measure is metrics related students’ persistence rate, academic standing, and graduation rate. Activities that support students’ success include intensive, proactive advising appointments and mentoring relationships that include both academic and extra-curricular topics; academic tutoring; and peer mentoring. Students are enrolled in a designated Gen 101 orientation course in their first semester that is geared toward TRIO students.

Many of the students in the targeted population of our QEP have profiles similar to that of the SSS students and we believe the activities in that program will inform our own QEP advising and support components. We are tapping some of the SSS students to participate in our QEP Student Advisory Team, and staff from the SSS office to serve on the QEP Development Committee, in order to incorporate their perspective and experience into all aspects of the QEP.

**Belknap Academic Classroom Building**

Our institution’s strategic goals, outlined in part in our 21st Century Initiative document, includes a call for empowering undergraduate learning and creating an environment for student success. This will come to fruition, in part, through the design and created of a new classroom building call the Belknap Academic Classroom Building (BACB). The building will put student success front and center in a number of ways. The BACB will have 14 active learning classrooms, 12 introductory science labs, and 34 group study spaces. The new Student Success Services Center will be housed on the first floor and serve as a “one stop shop” for undergraduates who seek our academic tutoring services, career advising and academic advising. The Student Success

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5 Data from the 2014-2015 academic year indicates the program’s success in supporting students’ persistence from one academic year to the next or to graduation (83.57% participant persistence rate which exceeds the target goal of 75%); success in maintaining students’ good academic standing (87.85% are in this category, exceeding the program goal of 80%), and positive graduation rates (students have achieved the goal of 55% of participants graduating within 6 years.).
Services Center design lends itself to the integrated career/academic advising that we are envisioning for our second-year students as part of the QEP.

The BACB is scheduled to open in fall 2018 and will coincide with our first offering of the QEP seminars. While the QEP seminar model is not the target for the BACB, which aims for large, general education courses. The design of “active learning” and engagement will clearly align with the intended designs of the QEP seminar.

Sophomore Leadership Program

The Student Leadership and Service program in the Office of Student Involvement is launching a new program for second-year students. The MORE program offers students a plan to develop their leadership skills and sense of self in community through numerous and varied active learning opportunities including meaning making reflection. MORE is a certificate program focused on sophomores and above; particularly those students who are still looking for their “perfect fit” for involvement at UofL. The program involves earning badges over time and with increasing depth and breadth of involvement. Based in the literature on second year student success (e.g. Schreiner, 2013 & Baxter-Magolda, 2004), this promising new program offers excellent shared goals with the QEP Seminar.

IV. Desired Student Learning Outcomes:

Specific, well-defined goals related to an issue of substance and depth, expected to lead to observable results (providing support for compliance with CS 3.3.2 “identifies goals”)

As part of the QEP Development process since February of 2015, we have developed and refined the purpose and goals of this QEP. Starting from the concept of “engagement”, the Best Practices subcommittee prepared an initial conceptual framework for our learning objectives which focused on “students taking ownership for their own learning.” As the QEP Development committee continued to delve into the literature, best practices, and measurements related to the second-year student issues, developmental theory, and approaches for supporting these students, the refinement and definition of the overall/general goal of the QEP and the definition of these learning outcomes emerged.

Overall Learning Goal:

Students will self-author their own learning through demonstrated confidence in their reasoning abilities, articulated awareness of habits of thinking and critical thinking dispositions (which are essential to their academic success), reaching a level of decidedness regarding their major/career path and be interested/invested/engaged in ownership of their own learning.

6 Self-authorship means a disposition toward acting and owning/defining/authoring oneself as learner, as a member of a group, as a critical thinker who can evaluate knowledge claims; to be part of a community of critical thinkers, accepting the fact that I am a thinker and I belong to this community of other thinkers. (See Baxter Magolda, 2004).

These two subgoals will be the formulation of learning outcomes:

1) **Intellectual Independence** – Demonstrate confidence in their reasoning abilities, become aware of habits of thinking that are essential to their success, and be interested in their own learning. Students will:

- Exhibit increased self-efficacy for academic development/learning (*academic self-efficacy*) and social integration (*sense of belonging*)
- Focus on thinking for themselves through ongoing critical reflections about their thinking in relation to an academic task
- Explain self-regulatory behaviors that increase self-directed learning through application in class activities and group presentations (*Make a psychological investment in their learning*)
- Engage and think proactively about their own thinking/reasoning process in relation to personal decision-making (*academic self-efficacy*§)

2) **Major and Career Clarity** – Students will gain a greater sense of meaning of decidedness§ and purpose through the exploration of their own major and career choices. Students will:

- Exhibit increased feeling of acceptance and membership in a group (*belonging within an institution*)
- Actively engage in educationally purposeful tasks (*we want students to self-identify their own learning in academic tasks*)
- Recognize vocation as the development of one’s self for and beyond career
- Engage in strategic planning to create multiple pathways to reach academic and life goals by completing group and individual planning projects

V. Literature Review and Best Practices:

Evidence of consideration of best practices related to the topic (providing support for compliance with CS 3.3.2 “institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP”).

Research reveals that the sophomore or second year of undergraduate study is a time when students struggle with increased expectations, intensified curriculum, and higher academic standards that may often lead to disengagement from academic life. This may “show up” in students’ life as a declining GPA and isolation from social activity at the institution (Pattengale and Schreiner, 2000). Many institutions create programs to ease students through their common first year challenges, but that infrastructure is often absent to facilitate transitions and issues in the second year. Even as the institutional environment may vary widely from institution to institution, there are a common set of second year students. These experiences and challenges are:

1) Questioning beliefs and values
2) Searching for meaning, purpose and identity.

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9 Gordon and Steele, 2015.
3) Exploring and selecting an academic major and possible vocational choices
4) Dealing with pressures related to future plans including internships, study abroad and life after college.
5) Questioning whether to remain at the institution of original matriculation or transfer

Boivin, Fountain, and Baylis (2000) argue that support for the second-year experience is necessary, as students often are able to "weather the storms of the first-year transition" but may "bail out" when faced with the challenges of the second year.

Student Retention

Student retention is a complex issue involving many different factors; however, clear research shows that a student's departure from an academic institution is largely related to the extent to which the student becomes academically and socially connected with the institution. Tinto (1975) indicates that as students are integrated into and become more interdependent with both academic and social elements of a university the probability that the student will leave the university declines. Tinto’s (1987) “departure model” of why students leave college involves academic, motivation, psycho/social, and financial factors. Much research shows that these factors intersect and contribute to significant attrition for the "undecided/exploratory" population.

Lavin and Cook (1992) found that frustration and attrition was evident among both two-year and four-year students who remained undeclared or undecided about their majors. Leppel (2001) shows that students with undecided majors have both low academic performance and low persistence rates and need tutoring and counseling in order to have a successful academic career (Rheinheimer, Grace-Odeleye, Francois, & Kusorgbor, 2010). Additional research indicates that "self-regulating decision making" is important for students to move beyond the transition points they will face in pursuing their education (Dobele et al., 2013; Galilee-Belfer, 2012; Capuzzi, 2012).

Exploratory students & their unique needs

Studies characterize some "undecided" students as uncertain and as exhibiting high levels of anxiety and frustration. (Kimes and Troth, 1974, O'Hare and Tamburri, 1986, Cooper, 2001, Dobele, et al. 2013, Tobolowski, 2008). The student's anxiety and frustration may play out as “academic boredom,” which may result in poor performance on assignments, delay in registration for subsequent semesters, and significant absences from class meetings. These students have the potential of getting “stuck” in a kind of academic limbo or of dropping out altogether. Additional research indicates that "self-regulating decision making" is important for students to move beyond the transition points they will face in pursuing their education. (Dobele, 2013; Galilee-Belfer, M. 2012; and Capuzzi, 2012).

Alternately, Cuseo (2007) notes that this categorization of undecided students does not equal "unfocused or uncertain." He argues that using "exploratory" to describe the undecided student better captures the range of characteristics of this group. While many scholars label these students "at risk," Cuseo approaches this population differently. Institutions should approach the issue not in terms of "whether or not students decide on a major." Rather, Cuseo argues that
when and how a student decides on a major are important considerations in program planning: timing and transition points are significant to planning programs and interventions. Gordon echoes this argument in her model of “decisiveness,” in which the high levels of uncertainty can override the process of self-reflection, self-regulation, and inquiry about one’s self (1984).

**The Issue of Timing:**

The issue of timing concerns both students’ own development and the nature of the undergraduate experience in the 2nd year. The extensive, well-researched literature and theory about college student identity development demonstrates that there are natural, normal processes and stages of psycho-social development that college students experience throughout their college experience (Chickering, 1993; Perry, 1968; Kegan, 1982). These stages are both part of making sense of their college experience as well as reflecting their emerging adulthood (Baxter Magolda, 2004). As individuals move from one developmental stage (young adulthood) into another (adulthood), college is a crucial site for identity formation (Kaufman, 2014). Chickering and Reisser (1993) describe this period as a significant “choice” stage.

Over the course of the second year, the "stakes" continue to get higher and higher as students must declare a major, take increasingly harder/more demanding coursework, and feel pressure to pick a "career" (Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000; Hunter et al, 2009; Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). Timing can become a difficult issue for the undecided/exploratory student. Registration for spring classes, committing to housing plans for the second year, and second semester mid-term grade reports, while all a part of the natural progression of the college experience, can become moments of crisis for the undecided student (Dobele et al., 2013; Rheinheimer, 2010; Schaller, 2006) or for students not admitted into the majors of their choice (Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013; Hu & McCormick 2012; Kass et al, 2011). As students move into their second year of undergraduate study, timing becomes even more prevalent.

As a result, the undecided/exploratory student will often focus on identifying a career rather than understanding the relationship of a chosen major to the student's academic desires, experiences, and choices (Gordon, 1984; Andrews, 1998; Galilee-Belfer, 2012). As second-year students begin to take upper-level General Education courses which might involve more writing, critical thinking, and college level learning than before, the stress to find a “career” is confronted with academic uncertainty (Hunter et al, 2009). While many students find a foothold during this transition, many experience feelings of "being stuck" or "slumping" (Schaller, 2007) and exhibit what seems to be a lack of motivation or disorganization. These feelings are compounded by lower levels of "self-efficacy" (Dogan, 2105).

Schaller (2005) argues that this process is a "critical moment" for second year students because they "may resort to external forces or old notions of themselves to make decisions for them." Structured activities in the academic setting such that students are involved in meaningful processing, focused attention, and active participation in the learning process. (Schreiner, 2010). Pre-unit students are at a greater risk for stalling out because they are likely to be students who sincerely believe that business, engineering, and/or nursing offer them the greatest career opportunities and yet these career paths are blocked for them. Many exploratory students do not
understand how or why they must re-calibrate their options and find a new academic path and programmatic “home” for themselves. (Gummadam, 2016, Browman & Destin, 2016).

Second year student research/sophomore slump

There are many "transition points" for students as they begin and move through their college experience. For the exploratory students, these points of transition are potential points of crisis (Gahagan, 2006). As students find a foothold and make choices for themselves, their transitions become more fluid, but for some students these points can become places of "feeling stuck." As the stakes get higher and higher (entering the second year and beyond), the "stuck" feeling becomes potentially compounded by lower levels of self-efficacy, increasingly more complex coursework, and potential feelings of boredom and decreased self-direction/motivation.

Second year students must grapple and resolve these issues to feel appropriately connected to their area of interest and major and to the institution itself. If they are unable to work through these concerns, they may begin to question if they should remain at the institution or in college generally (Hunter et al 2008).

While these points of transition can become potential points of crisis for all students (Dobele et al., 2013; Rheinheimer, 2010; Schaller, 2006), but they are particularly treacherous for students who are undecided or not admitted into the major of their choice (Rigali-Oiler & Kurpius, 2013; Hu & McCormick, 2012; Kass et al, 2012). In order to thrive, these students need to become self-regulators and to develop confidence in their decision-making abilities.

How to best serve this population & help them thrive

In order to foster “intellectual independence” among our target students (exploratory) who are at a critical transition (within the 2nd year), best practices, theory, and research suggest these areas of focus that inform this proposal.

An inquiry approach

Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) argue that one’s sense of capacity to learn and succeed in the academic environment leads to continued retention. They define the term “academic self-efficacy” as, “The self-evaluation of one’s ability or chance for success (or both) in the academic environment.” Additionally, the ways that student’s “view knowledge” factors into their capacity to engage in the increasing challenges of the undergraduate experience. Baxter Magolda (2004) argues that students need to be “worked actively” to move their intellectual development.

An inquiry-guided model aims to provide the structures and processes to foster this sort of activity. Such scaffolded activities such as: exploration, question identification, methods of investigation, collection and analysis of data, drawing conclusions, and communicating results” (Lee, 2004) mirror the models of exploration that second-year student development theorists such as Molly Schaller and Laurie Schreiner report as effective.
By inviting students to engage in academic inquiry, this seminar will set the academic context that mirrors High-Impact Practices (Kuh, 2008, 2013). Such activities include:

- Reflecting on their experiences inside or outside the classroom;
- Integrating and seeing the connections between courses, out-of-class experiences, and life beyond the institution;
- Applying and using what they have learned in different settings that present novel challenges and opportunities; and
- Developing intellectual traits for thinking, being a good citizen, succeeding in life.

**Decision-making and "Thriving"**

Self-efficacy is defined in relation to two factors: Independence and responsibility for one's own learning; and understanding of one's own ability to succeed. As mentioned above, Tinto (1987) notes that students who are integrated socially and intellectually into the life of the institution are more likely to persist until degree completion. Raelin et al. (2014) find that academic self-efficacy and contextual support are critical to retention and that contextual support is particularly important for women. Wood, Newman, & Harris (2015) identify a correlation between math and English self-efficacy for black men when faculty members engage with them.

Laurie Schreiner has been working in this area of research for more than ten years, and her model of the "Thriving Quotient" serves as a helpful resource (2009). Students who are thriving are "succeeding academically, energized by the learning process, setting and achieving goals that are important to them... and enjoying their college experience (p. 2). Schreiner (2009) argues that there are two facets of academic thriving: engaged learning and academic determination.

Various research areas use similar terms: psycho-social researchers use the term, "autonomy" (Vieira & Grantham, 2011), "motivation" (Allen, 1999), or "self-esteem" (Gębka, 2014); career development researchers use the term "decision making" (Kelly & Hatcher, 2013). The literature in the area of "thriving" suggests that providing opportunities for students to choose ways of demonstrating their mastery of learning and providing support for students to gain footholds and the confidence to own their own learning are factors to consider.

**Developing self-regulating practices**

Research indicates that "self-regulating decision making" is important for students to move beyond this transition point. (see Dobele, 2013; Galilee-Belfer, M. 2012; and Capuzzi, 2012).

Joe Cuseo (2012) outlines four factors involved in choosing a major: sources of information, job characteristics, fit and interest in the subject, and characteristics of the major. For the undecided/exploratory student, these factors can both enable choice and inhibit choice. Therefore, this proposal attends to the development of self-authorship, which is a disposition toward acting and owning/defining/authoring oneself as learner, as a member of a group, and as a critical thinker who can evaluate knowledge claims (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Cognitive behaviorist theorists argue that fostering critical thinking and inquiry practices will support students “growth mindset.” (Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012, Obrien, et al., 2015,Bamber, 2016), which, in turn, increases self-efficacy for learning and social integration. The cognitive
and affective elements of engagement that will be incorporated into the inquiry model of engaged learning for our QEP derive from positive psychology and motivation theory situated in the emerging research around belonging (Ellicot, 2016, Tough, 2014, Gummadam, 2016).

VI. Actions to be Implemented:

Evidence of careful analysis of institutional context in designing actions capable of generating the desired student learning outcomes (providing support for compliance with CS 3.3.2 “institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP”)

Creation and Launch of a Seminar for Second-Year Students

We envision that to meet these student learning outcomes, students will be engaged in guided inquiry and reflection on a significant academic topic under the guidance of a faculty mentor while simultaneously engaged in inquiry and reflection on major and career path with support from a career/academic advisor. We propose our QEP to focus on the implementation and assessment of a 3-credit seminar course focused on academic and personal development of exploratory students. While the roots of the QEP proposal are grounded in the institutional data related to second-to-third-year persistence for a subset of our student body, the QEP Development Committee acknowledges this gap in student success as an opportunity to foster a campus-wide conversation about student learning and student success in the crucial second year that can have long-term implications for our support of our undergraduate population inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, students will be recruited for and advised into the seminar, but the course will be open to other students who seek to deepen their academic skills and explore the alignment of their majors, career plans, and personal strengths.

Inquiry-Guided Learning Approach

The QEP seminar course design and activities will be shaped around principles of Inquiry Guided Learning (IGL). IGL is made up of a suite of classroom practices that do not have a common heuristic or prescribed set or assignments. However, Virginia Lee’s definition guides many schools as a starting point in adopting an IGL approach to learning: “IGL promotes the acquisition of new knowledge, abilities, and attitudes through students’ increasingly independent investigation of questions, problems and issues, for which there is often no single answer.” (Lee, 2004). There are a variety of IGL models and frameworks adopted by instructors and institutions that can inform how we will approach inserting IGL into our QEP.

Many of these frameworks have these common inquiry stages: “exploration, question or problem identification, inquiry design including methods of investigation, collection and analysis of data or evidence, development of conclusions or solutions, and communication of results.” (Lee, 2004). While these may be common stages, the topic for inquiry ranges widely across disciplines and faculty are encouraged to interpret and operationalize these activities within the specific approaches and norms of their discipline. Students inquiry may focus on a real-world
problem in the field, open-ended investigation of a perennial question in the discipline, or develop and pursue questions within the scope of a wider issue or concern in the field.

To design the inquiry aspect of our QEP, and align it with our learning outcomes, the members of the QEP Development Committee and the QEP Faculty Work Group will vet a handful of IGL rubrics and framework in order to recommend a shared approach to IGL that aligns with our QEP outcomes, reflects the core values of IGL, and permits flexibility in the modes of adoption by the faculty who will be teaching the QEP seminar. Some of these common frameworks we will vet include the Hudspith and Jenkins inquiry process (2001); Justice inquiry outcomes (2006); and the Research Skill Development (RSD) framework by Willison and O’Regan (2007).

The specific assessments and tools that an advisor would draw from the recommendations from the CDC. (See the description of these tools here).

**Advising**

The initial QEP seminar pilot sections in Spring 2018 will allow us to create and pilot an integrated approach to academic/career advising with a limited number of advisor serving a limited number of QEP seminar section, providing us with an experimental “lab” that will inform both the next iterations of the QEP seminar and the common ground and shared conversations between the units that will be part of the Student Success Center. We will train a select number of career and academic advisors to help us shape, implement and shape this integrated approach.

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**Figure 1** *This is a working draft of a 2015 graphic representation of advising domains created by the Career Services Council in conjunction with academic advising leaders at UofL.*
The middle box reflects crossover activities that captures the spirit of integrated career/academic advising.

For our specific advising model to serve the goals of the QEP, we expect the following activities would be part of our integrated QEP advising approach:

- Explore academic, vocational, and life goals
- Clarify/define personal and career goals
- Select academic paths and programs
- Engage in academic and career planning
- Emphasize the relationship between educational choices and general career fields
- Connect students to academic support services and resources
- Counsel students on getting the most out of their college experience

We are discussing how to select a subset of the existing academic and career advisors who will assist with the design, delivery and assessment of this new integrated advising model. We are also discussing hiring a full-time advisor (a specialist for integrative advising) with expertise in integrated advising who will then serve as the coordinator for the advising components of the seminar and oversee the activities of the other advisors who will work alongside the faculty teaching the seminar. This specialist will develop, with the QEP staff and other QEP leaders, the training, coaching, advising and assessment activities for the QEP advisors.

QEP Staff Team – UNDER DEVELOPMENT

QEP Faculty Work Group

The QEP Development Committee is convening a work group of 8-12 faculty, to be drawn from academic programs across UofL, who are interested in contributing to the creation of the curriculum for the new QEP seminar for second-year students.

A faculty work group will be convened in both fall 2016 and spring 2017 semesters and facilitated by Patty Payette and Riaan van Zyl. Ideally, faculty who participate will serve on the group both semesters to provide continuity in the planning, and some faculty representatives from the QEP Development Committee will be part of the Work Group, thus providing linkages between both bodies. 6 bi-weekly meeting each semester will ensure that the group can accomplish the specific tasks needed for each semester to provide the design, structures, and specifics to launch the training and recruitment of faculty to teach the QEP seminar.

The Fall 2016, the Work Group will:

- Review the QEP-related goals and seminar outcomes and review selected research and best practices assembled by the QEP Development Committee to grasp the campus and
scholarly contexts of the QEP, including topics related to the developmental needs of second-year students and the developmental and intellectual student learning outcomes of the seminar.

- Discuss and decide on promising practices, curricular components of the seminar and the syllabus with active input from key campus partners who will bring expertise in curricular design, academic advising, career counseling, assessment and other areas.
- Propose a seminar description and draft of curriculum components to the QEP Development Committee that is designed to become part of the QEP proposal provided to SACS in March 2017.

**The Spring 2017, the Work Group will:**

- Build on the recommendations of the fall 2016 faculty work group, refining the seminar curricular components, syllabus, and assessment plans in order to incorporate the ongoing feedback from the campus community.
- Assist the QEP Development Committee in reviewing the advice and recommendations from the SACS onsite visitors who will be reviewing our QEP proposal in March 2017 and making alterations to the curriculum and/or seminar plans accordingly.
- Provide guidance and recommendations on the structure and goals of the QEP Faculty Learning Community to be launched in fall 2017 in order to engage the QEP pilot faculty in preparing to teach the QEP second-year seminars in spring 2018.

**VII. Timeline:**

*A logical calendaring of all actions to be implemented (providing support for compliance with CS 3.3.2 “institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP”)*

**Fall 2016:**

- Faculty Work Group I convenes to discuss and decide on promising practices, curricular components of the seminar and the syllabus with active input from key campus partners who will bring expertise in curricular design, academic advising, career counseling, assessment and other areas. They will propose a seminar curriculum to the QEP Development Committee that is designed to become part of the QEP proposal provided to SACS in March 2017.
- QEP Development Committee engages in an outreach campaign to elevate awareness about the proposed QEP to campus constituents across the campus. At the same time, they conduct extensive discussions, presentations and feedback sessions to engage the campus constituents in the helping shape the QEP construction.
- QEP Development Committee prepares the QEP proposal to be delivered to SACS by March 6, 2017.
• Submit names of QEP Lead Evaluators to SACS by December, 2016.

Spring 2017:
• The spring QEP Faculty Work Group II will build on the recommendations of the fall 2016 faculty Work Group, refining the seminar curricular components, syllabus, and assessment plans in order to incorporate the ongoing feedback from the campus community.
• This group will assist the QEP Development Committee in reviewing the advice and recommendations from the SACS onsite visitors who will be reviewing our QEP proposal in March 2017 and making alterations to the curriculum and/or seminar plans accordingly.
• Host the SACS visit, April, 2017.
• QEP Development Committee begins to transition to QEP Implementation Committee with new charge issued by the provost.
• Begin to recruit faculty to teach the pilot sections of the QEP seminar in Spring 2018.
• Finalize curriculum for QEP Faculty Learning Community to take place in fall 2017 to train new QEP faculty.

Fall 2017:
• QEP Implementation Committee begins to meet bimonthly/monthly.
• First offering of the QEP Faculty Learning Community to train the faculty teaching the pilot sections in spring.

Spring 2018:
• Offer first 4 sections of the QEP seminar as pilot semester

VIII. Organizational Structure: - UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Clear lines of responsibility for implementation and sustainability (providing support for compliance CS 3.3.2 “institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP”)

IX. Resources: - UNDER DEVELOPMENT

A realistic allocation of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources (providing support for compliance CS 3.3.2 “institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP”)

X. Assessment:

A comprehensive evaluation plan (providing support for compliance with CS 3.3.2 “a plan to assess their achievement”) This plan lists our outcomes and, for each, explains how the
The QEP Assessment Plan will include assessments of student learning at the course level, an ongoing assessment of the course, and an evaluation of the impact these practices have on student success beyond the second year. The issue at hand is, to what degree do various best practices around the second-year experience impact the students’ sense of purpose in facilitating their success at the institution? As students navigate through the second year and persist beyond the second-year of college, these efforts become increasingly critical for students who may need clarity and confidence in their endeavor here at the University of Louisville. Therefore, our primary target population will be exploratory students in their second year who will be recruited and advised into participating in the seminar. The goal of the project would be to apply components or aspects of the course to students generally who are seeking to deepen their academic skills and explore the alignment of their majors, career plans, and personal strengths.

The following goals and outcomes have been identified from the research to help us leverage various learning opportunities to assist students in their development and success:

1. **Intellectual Independence** – Demonstrate confidence in their reasoning abilities, become aware of habits of thinking that are essential to their success, and be interested in their own learning. Students will:
   - Exhibit increased self-efficacy for learning and social integration
   - Focus on thinking for themselves through ongoing critical reflections around their thinking
   - Explain self-regulatory behaviors that increase self-directed learning through application in class activities and group presentations
   - Engage and think proactively about their own thinking/reasoning process

2. **Major and Career Clarity** – Students will gain a greater sense of meaning and purpose through the exploration of their own major and career choices. Students will:
   - Exhibit increased feeling of acceptance and membership in a group
   - Actively engage in educationally purposeful tasks
   - Recognize vocation as the development of one’s self for and beyond career
   - Engage in strategic planning to create multiple pathways to reach academic and life goals by completing group and individual planning projects

Both formative and summative assessment approaches will be conducted at the course level to examine and improve aspect of student learning and to assess the overall impact of the course and its components. In assessing student learning within the course, students will be prompted to demonstrate various learning outcomes though their writing and participation in various in-class and out-of-class activities. Group work and peer evaluations will be threaded into the course design to elevate collaborative learning between students. Student artifacts will be assessed using various rubrics which will be common among the various sections of the sophomore seminar. Students will also be prompted to rate their own learning in the course as well as compete an
array of assessment surveys. Student learning data collected at the course level will be housed in LiveText. Examples of direct and indirect measures for student learning are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Measures</th>
<th>Indirect Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Portfolio/Student artifacts</td>
<td>• Embedded Survey Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Culminating Critical Reflection/Research</td>
<td>• Pre- and post-survey (academic self-efficacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weekly Journals</td>
<td>• Pre- and post-survey (belonging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Milestone assignments</td>
<td>• Other specialized surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engagement Activity</td>
<td>• Course grades</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The seminar course will be assessed on an ongoing basis, revisiting elements of the course design, learning outcomes, and other learning prompts and artifacts. Faculty and professional staff will be asked to provide ongoing feedback through surveys, focus groups, and participation in analyzing student learning data. Students will also be prompted throughout the course using a standardized course assessment tool, class evaluations, and student focus groups. As with student learning data, both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected, analyzed, and shared to inform continual improvement of the course delivery each semester. Examples of direct and indirect measures for assessing the course are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Measures</th>
<th>Indirect Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Course Design</td>
<td>• Embedded Survey Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Syllabus</td>
<td>• Ongoing CIQ’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assignments/Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>• Professional survey/feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Integration of advising/career</td>
<td>• Faculty survey/feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the project level, a regression analysis will be conducted annually utilizing key learning, dispositional, and institutional variables to determine which aspects of the project had the most impact or influence in students’ successful progression at the university. Student learning data collected at the course level will be housed in LiveText and additional assessment data will be collected and house centrally with the QEP team.

XI. Appendix A – References Cited:


