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Status of the Writing QEP

Submitted by: Rob Pirro

11/16/2016

Discussion:

Could an administrator with the relevant facts come to the Senate and report on the progress that has been made in implementing the Writing QEP. For example, In how many departments has the QEP been implemented? What are the two or three most significant QEP activities that are presently taking place? What progress, if any, is there to report on student writing? Are there plans to expand the implementation of the QEP or change any of its aspects?

Rationale:

The Writing QEP is a university undertaking that involves many faculty and students. We are some years into its implementation. It seems time for the Senate to get a report and have an opportunity to ask questions.

Response:

Minutes 11-28-2016:

1. [Discussion Item on QEP: Teresa Flateby, Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness will update and answer questions.](#)

VP Flateby introduced her two assistant directors, who are also Associate Professors, and noted they would join in this discussion.

The QEP was developed about two and a half years ago with a team of faculty members, students, and administrators. The QEP is called *Georgia Southern! Eagles! Write!*

Write! Write! The emphasis is on the development of students' analysis, argumentation, and synthesis skills communicated through writing: "So you could equally say that this is, think, think, think QEP as well." The plan is being phased in over five years. We started it in fall 2015 with fourteen programs in which a course was identified as a writing enriched course. There was already writing in these classes, but some changes were introduced by the faculty members. This year, we have those fourteen programs continuing with that initial course and they have identified a second writing enriched course. Over five years, the goal is to build to 60% of all programs in each college participating. We're in year two and have eleven new programs involved. Next year, the first group of programs will be offering three enriched courses. After five years three classes in each of the programs will be initiated. Two of the writing enriched courses are supposed to be sequential. Two are required. The third can be an elective.

Brad Sturz (Associate Professor of Psychology) said one activity is the involvement of "student writing fellows," mostly undergraduate students. Often, the student writing fellows can spend the time that we all would like to spend with our students, but can't, for example, seeing multiple drafts of a piece of writing before it is turned in for a grade.

Ashley Walker (Associate Professor, Community Health) said they also offer faculty development opportunities. For example, Michael Pemberton, Director of the Writing Center, offers sessions during the semester on writing instructions to make sure you are getting the product you want your students to be producing, since data showed faculty instructions and writing prompts were not always as clear as they thought. There's another on providing effective feedback without making it too time-consuming. There are also workshops in which faculty experienced in the QEP share their strategies with each other and with new faculty.

Sturz added that they hold a summer retreat that features an external speaker. There are also monthly meetings within each college. The goal is collaboration and sharing of what does and does not work. The ultimate goal is to change the culture at Georgia Southern University with respect to appreciation of writing and its importance.

Walker said they have an implementation team of faculty, students, and staff that is split into three subgroups: one looking at changing the culture of writing from a student perspective; one looking at how to involve the staff who work with students on a

day-to-day basis to model good writing skills, such as good email composition; and one seeking to incorporate other things on campus where students are using high-level thinking skills outside the classroom. There is also discussion of involving Residence Life in the process, maybe doing some writing workshops within the residence halls. One to-do item is to have the Writing Center open during all summer terms.

Sturz said a running theme through all of this is collecting information and identifying what resources individuals need to be successful in this implementation.

VP Flateby moved to indicators of change in students' writing. The QEP gathers data through the programs' annual assessment reports, which include QEP-related outcomes. One goal is the understanding that writing is a process, not an event, and they are trying to get students to use that process beyond just the classes that they are currently in. Almost all program reports have indicated that from the beginning assignment to the last, there were changes. They specifically mentioned students' facility in finding and using credible sources increasing over past students' performance. They also seem to have a better awareness of audience needs. As for writing being a process, when they first asked students why they were engaged in this, they said to improve their grades, but they're saying something a little bit more than that now.

Walker noted that she teaches these courses in rotation with Raymona Lawrence. One positive change is students coming to her office to ask specific questions. But they have found that students are still struggling with the synthesis of information and reading the peer review literature, so Lawrence created a new teaching strategy for students to analyze and synthesize articles and this created strong improvements; Walker planned to adapt the strategy and they would collect data on its efficacy and continue modifying approaches as directed by the data. Her students complain less because they know she expects a lot from them and they understand that, and because everything is related to their field of study and what they are going to be doing as practitioners. The biggest changes are with students who tend to struggle because she takes more time to walk them through this process. She and other colleagues have also noticed that the comments from the student ratings of instruction are more thoughtful – complete thoughts instead of little blurbs and bullet points; the same occurs on discussion boards. And in their writing there is less Wikipedia and more peer reviewed literature and websites.

Ellen Hamilton (CHHS) noted that faculty and student writing fellows do not edit students' papers; feedback helps them learn the process themselves.

Sturz noted that this term he implemented some QEP strategies in a non-QEP class, starting the first week on breaking the term paper down into subcomponents. He had one student tell him she'd been struggling, but then she presented her ideas to him in exactly the way we hope students will, and she thanked him for starting the process from the start of the semester. He had provided the steps to help her skills grow.

VP Flateby noted a University-level assessment process that includes the faculty member submitting the students' writing enriched papers to the office, where some are selected at random to be evaluated and scored by other QEP faculty during summer. They use a rubric that sometimes has to be adjusted depending upon the discipline. So far they have produced some discipline-specific data that shows students are improving re: revision, research, and thoughtfulness, but right now this really is baseline data.

Walker addressed the expansion and modification of the QEP implementation. They are trying to modify the initial written plan via information gathered from the college meetings and the course reports. For example, it is on this basis that plans have been made to keep the Writing Center open throughout the summer terms. This coming summer's retreat for QEP faculty may develop further modifications

Rob Pirro (CLASS) noted that many of his students complain they have too many papers due at the same time at the end of a term and so he sensed that they approach papers strategically, giving only some full effort depending on what grade they want in any specific course. He wanted to know if we considered it a success or failure that students can write A papers, but often write lesser quality papers because of the schedule.

VP Flateby noted that this QEP is focused on writing in the disciplines, so probably the writing in these particular courses is fairly important to the students. She also noted that these assignments are given throughout the term, so this is not necessarily a huge research paper at the end of a term. Many of these are called "writing to learn" assignments, so there's a lot more writing going on, but they may not be graded as heavily. All of this writing is in the discipline so they would be more interested in developing their writing and their thinking more than maybe in a course they're not as interested in.

Pirro noted that it had been said that their goal was 60% to begin with, and asked if we are looking for 100% participation in future.

VP Flateby said they'd love 100%, but the goal was 60%. They will continue to encourage more participation, and in some colleges it will be 100%.

Pirro asked for clarification that going from 60% to 100% would be through a voluntary process, and not through bureaucratic fiat. VP Flateby said, "Right."