



Quality Enhancement Plan

Guilford Technical Community College

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On Site Visit: September 20-21, 2004

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SECTION 1--Brief Descriptive Title

“Employability Skills: Reflected and Expected”

The Quality Enhancement Plan for Guilford Technical Community College seeks to improve its specific measurement of student attainment of the Employability skills. (Guilford Technical Community College has identified the Employability Skills as Teamwork, Responsibility, Communication, Problem-solving, Information Processing, and Adaptability.)

SECTION 2--Creative and vital to the long term improvement of student learning

The ambitious theme we have chosen is appropriate for our institution, is certainly creative, and will have long-term impact on the improvement of student learning. Because GTCC is one of the earlier colleges to seek reaffirmation under the Principles of Accreditation, a search for sample Quality Enhancement themes and model plans bore limited results. However, one recurring theme was retention—single course retention rates; retention of special populations (transfer students, minority students); retention from freshman to sophomore year, for example. Our college-wide focus groups’ consistent refrain had less to do with retention than with student success. More particularly, the groups almost uniformly discussed behaviors—both of the college faculty and staff with students (and each other) as well as student behaviors in all phases of the academic process. We felt our Quality Enhancement Plan would need to address these issues.

Our QEP is creative for these reasons:

1. It is ambitious, seeking to measure “soft skills”—an area that, in spite of the emphasis on these important workplace skills, does not have an extensive history of assessment.
2. It seeks to improve not only student behavior to enhance their learning, but also to improve staff, faculty, and college behaviors. Students will be expected to learn the Employability Skills and that learning will be measured. And this learning

will take place in an environment in which those skills are routinely modeled. We have challenged ourselves to some of the learning. Everyone will be part of the learning and the message.

3. It takes us to a unifying “next level” on a number of college initiatives. In fact, the QEP team felt a sense of real excitement that on-going college-wide projects would be re-energized by the focus of the QEP. While the word “synergy” has perhaps been overused in some contexts, the QEP team and the Leadership Team each felt the distinct possibility that the QEP could help us focus as a college, and in doing so, bring new energy to old but important projects.

Employability skills have been a focus at the college for ten years. In addition, the president has emphasized the need for the college to become learning centered, performance-based, and data driven. At the same time, there is increasing statewide emphasis on accountability to the North Carolina Community College System and to the North Carolina General Assembly on mandated Performance Measures, as well as increasing pressure from advisory committees and local employers for graduates with basic “soft skills.” And in a final confluence of events, the college has just received a large grant to focus on efforts to enhance the success of targeted at risk populations. The QEP will provide an overall unifying theme for each of these as well as the need to assure their link to student learning and to document results.

The QEP is vital to the long-term improvement of student learning. As the QEP team examined focus group responses, it became obvious that the perception college-wide was that student learning was often impeded by inappropriate student behaviors. Indeed, the very skills the college had identified as “Employability Skills” and stated as one of the sets of “Institutional-level Student Competencies” were the same skills that would help student success in the classroom and with learning. Student behaviors were often the primary interference with their learning and success. These behaviors included or resulted from

- Not coming to class or not coming on time

- Not completing assignments
- Not having a sense of their “academic career path” or academic program, particularly in college transfer programs
- Not being able to work well with teams or view a classroom as a community
- Not following college processes—registration, graduation application, withdrawal
- Not being adequately prepared for the “college experience” both academically and socially.

The focus groups also were honest in their appraisal of the college itself being “part of the problem.” We had not communicated clearly, we had not modeled behavior we expect from students. In short, we too often were part of the problem and not part of the solution.

SECTION 3--Definition of student learning appropriate to the focus of the OEP

We will define learning as the process of acquiring skills or knowledge. Further, learning will result in changes in behavior. Ultimately, the learning of employability skills and the application of these skills (and changed behavior) in an academic setting will result in enhanced student learning in their courses and programs.

SECTION 4--Evidence that developing the OEP has engaged all appropriate campus constituencies

To assure that the QEP theme was not a top-down, mandated initiative, the QEP planning team devised a process to engage all college constituencies in the process of determining the QEP. The primary tools used in this process were college-wide access to email, focus groups, and the institutional planning process.

From the outset, the QEP planning team determined that the “appropriate campus constituencies” meant everyone at the college, not just those with direct and obvious links to student learning. We felt very strongly that everyone at the college is responsible for aspects of student learning and that the more broadly based our commitment to enhancing student learning, the more impact we would have on students and their success.

The team used the available communication channels to lay groundwork for a college-wide, common understanding of the new SACS process in general and the QEP in particular, including providing information in these settings:

- Regular meetings at all levels, including all personnel meetings, Board of Trustees meetings, President's Council (President's direct reports), Communication Council (all managers), Instructional Managers, Student Services Managers' meetings, for example.
- College-wide email (GTCCALL) to brief all employees on SACS information
- Internal SACS web site, with updates on the process

Throughout spring and summer 2003, college-wide focus groups addressed a common set of questions with trained facilitators. The results of each focus group were compiled and submitted to the Institutional Research and Planning Office for summarizing. Before the meeting to assess these findings, the QEP planning team sent out final calls for two final focus groups to be held for anyone who had been unable to participate in earlier groups. Approximately 30 non-instructional focus groups convened, and focus groups of each instructional area or department met as well. After all units, instructional and non-instructional, had met and discussed the guided questions, the facilitators submitted summaries of their discussions. (See appendix for focus group questions, facilitator guide, summary of focus group responses by Institutional Research and Planning Office.)

The QEP planning team reviewed the focus group summaries and ultimately reviewed the Institutional Research and Planning Office (IRP) summary of all focus groups. In addition, the IRP Office provided a summary of each planning unit's perceived challenges as identified in the annual planning documents. As this work progressed, GTCCALL emails were sent to summarize the general trends emerging from the focus groups. Everyone was invited to comment on the three themes that emerged.

After the final summaries, input from all faculty and staff, and extensive discussion, the QEP planning team determined the single theme that had emerged. This was presented to

the faculty at their fall convocation (August 2003) and to all employees at the college-wide employee Celebration of Excellence in October 2003.

Finally, once the QEP theme was selected, the QEP planning team worked with the Institutional Research and Planning Office (IRP) to build the QEP theme into the annual planning process. The Director of IRP asked each unit to include a mandatory planning objective linked to the QEP. As a result, each planning unit on campus (115 planning units) was charged with creating a specific, measurable objective towards the teaching/learning of employability skills for the upcoming year. Prior to the planning process, the members of the QEP planning team held four formal training sessions, “QEP Training Session: Planning for Planning.” In these sessions, participants were given specific steps on how to develop an objective linked to the QEP and several models of QEP-linked objectives. The team also worked informally with any department needing specific help.

In short, the QEP planning team and the SACS Leadership Team felt that every effort had been made to engage fully the entire college community, from students to Board of Trustee members, from grounds keepers to counselors, from administration to faculty. In addition, everyone was provided with multiple points of entry into the process and given a chance to join focus groups, comment on the work-in-progress, or even join the QEP planning team. Ultimately, all became aware of their roles in the QEP by building a specific objective towards its implementation into their own unit’s planning document.

SECTION 5--Description of the importance of the QEP that will help others understand its value and appropriateness to the institution

GTCC has a long term, college-wide commitment to workforce preparedness and *teaching* skills to prepare students for the workforce. The QEP enables the college to focus on the more important issue: students *learning* skills that prepare them for the workforce. The QEP we have chosen is extremely challenging. However, it is the most logical, appropriate, and student-centered next step for us.

The QEP chosen by the college is not only appropriate to the institution, it is in many ways the logical “next step” in several critical college initiatives. In fact, the QEP has the potential of bringing what may have been viewed as disparate initiatives into one clearly focused, long-term plan. These initiatives are

- Workforce Preparedness
- Performance-based learning
- Becoming a Learning Centered College
- Achieving the Dream (Lumina Foundation Grant)

To understand the QEP’s relevance and importance, some college history is worth relating. Each of the four initiatives has been of significance to the college and each has been (with the exception of the recently awarded Lumina Grant) part of the president’s annual initiatives. While a discussion of the QEP and the college plans for its implementation is the focus of this report and proposal, the QEP will capitalize on these existing initiatives. And with the help of the focus and force of the QEP, the college will make observable, measurable progress that truly improves student learning.

WORKFORCE PREPAREDNESS

The college has a strong history of commitment to Workforce Preparedness, one both awarded and nationally noted in, among other places, an article appearing on the front page of the Wall Street Journal November 26, 1996. That commitment led the college to explore those ways in which we might help prepare students for the workforce. In applying for the three-year grant from the Ciba Educational Foundation, the college noted in the application that one of our goals was to “be a national model in developing the standards for the employability skills and incorporating them into the curriculum.” Interestingly—and appropriate to a ten year old context of college and educational history—the focus is more on teaching than on learning and learning assessment.

Since 1997, the Employability Skills have been an integral part of curriculum planning at the college. It was then that the college sponsored a DACUM to articulate the basic core competencies essential for successfully preparing new employees for the workplace. The

DACUM was created as a part of the Ciba Educational Foundation Grant project. That DACUM articulated the specific Employability Skills and provided the first important steps towards integrating the teaching of these skills throughout the college's programs and courses.

As a part of the Ciba Foundation Grant work, the college was able to implement a number of strategies to help faculty integrate the employability skills into their classrooms:

- For two years, the Ciba Cadre, a group of public school and GTCC faculty, met regularly, including sessions devoted to devising sample teaching strategies/assignments for each of the identified Employability Skills.
- During that two-year period, selected faculty toured industry (particularly faculty from more traditional academic backgrounds) to acquaint “traditional academics” in particular to employability skills’ importance in a variety of work settings.
- Specific employability skill faculty work teams focused on particular Employability Skill bands on the DACUM to define terms and create assignments. The first projects were on information processing and communication.
- As a result of the work on information processing and communication work, off campus retreats were held to design curriculum and sample assignments. The final product was a notebook of sample assignments for the Employability Skills bands.
- Seeing the need to blend both soft skills and program competencies in all courses, the college began to explore the use of the Worldwide Instructional Design System (WIDS) as a tool to develop curriculum and revise courses to include soft skills and their measurement.
- Norena Badway (National Center for Research in Vocational Education) visited the campus twice to facilitate workshops on curriculum integration concepts. These workshops were designed to help faculty integrate academic skills into technical courses, and technical skills and concepts into academic courses.

Emphasis was placed on authentic assignments and constant reinforcement of “real world” applications of course work.

- Individual departments worked on identifying specific Employability Skills that could be taught and evaluated in their courses. In many departments, these skills and expectations were identified on course syllabi.
- Departments and degree programs with advisory committees began to review the Employability Skills DACUM. Each advisory committee ranked the importance of each of the skills for that particular degree.
- A handbook called “Educating the Workforce” was developed. This booklet is a guide to department chairs on necessary steps in integrating program skills, academic skills, and Employability Skills in degree programs.
- After Ciba Cadre analysis of which Employability Skill might be the most unfamiliar to traditional educational environments, professional development was offered in how to teach and assess teamwork. As a result, Cooperative Learning Training by the Center for Cooperative Learning at Florida Community College at Jacksonville has been given to approximately 100 GTCC faculty, assisting them with skills to teach and use teamwork skills with students.
- Tech Prep funding allowed us to expand the visits to industry to an annual Educator in the Workplace program for Arts and Sciences faculty. Because these faculty tend to be the most traditionally academic, this program was developed to allow faculty to experience two week “stints” in a non-academic setting, then return to campus to write curriculum based on their experiences.
- Perkins Funds allowed us to develop the Faculty Consultant Program. This program released communication and English faculty to work with their colleagues in technical programs to develop assignments, teaching strategies, assessments, and rubrics for using speaking and writing more intensively in technical courses.

In short, the Ciba Foundation grant project and the resulting work based on the Employability Skills DACUM have informed the college’s curriculum. In fact, the Board of Trustees adopted a set of Institutional Level Student Competencies: Program Skills,

Core Academic Skills, and Employability Skills. These expected outcomes are printed in the College Catalog and are the guiding principle for curricular decisions.

PERFORMANCE-BASED LEARNING

In addition to the introduction of Employability Skills as core competencies expected of students, the college began to move to a clearer set of student outcomes in programs and in courses. Using the Worldwide Instructional Design System (WIDS), the college began to focus on performance-based learning. While the college had an ongoing commitment to outcomes-based education, we had not done enough to assure that observable, measurable outcomes were not just statements of principle. We needed to do more to be sure that outcomes were clearly articulated for all programs and all courses.

The WIDS training process has presented the college with both successes and challenges. While the software (then in its initial design stages) was daunting and, for some, off putting, the underlying principles of performance-based instruction and assessment were clearly on target. Therefore, over a two-year period, department chairs were briefed, then faculty were trained, department by department. During the training, faculty used their own syllabi to practice competency writing and other skills, and after the workshop, faculty continued to modify syllabi to reflect performance-based competencies.

The WIDS training was primarily focused on writing clear competencies. That training was also intended to address the integration of specific Employability Skills, and in some cases, the training sessions did enable faculty using the WIDS software to link specific Employability Skills to course competencies. However, the college-wide review of syllabi and course competencies revealed that the primary focus of these trainings needed to be on writing competencies. Therefore, although the philosophical commitment to a clearer integration of Employability Skills existed, reality limited our ability fully to implement Employability Skills teaching and assessment at that time. We needed to focus first on program and course outcomes.

Still, the performance-based learning initiative has provided fundamental groundwork for our QEP. How does the performance-based learning initiative link to the QEP's appropriateness to the institution? There are three key links.

1. Clear Competencies on All Syllabi

First of all, the college-wide review of syllabi from all departments helped us to work with all faculty on the concept of writing performance-based outcomes. For the most part, faculty across the college have a clear understanding of writing competencies and learning objectives that are observable and measurable, and they have a clear idea that assessments should be directly linked to those competencies. This understanding provides solid groundwork for the writing of clearer Employability Skills competencies and being sure these competencies (and related learning objectives) are observable and measurable.

2. Employability Skills Included in Courses

Secondly, the WIDS/performance-based learning initiative re-emphasized that all courses should integrate instruction of Employability Skills and that these skills should be documented on the syllabi. While every group did not progress to using the WIDS software to link Employability Skills with competencies, each group was briefed about the importance of linking skills and the possibility of using the software to do that linkage. In addition, in the college-wide review of syllabi to check for clear competencies, one of the reviewers' criteria was specific mention of particular Employability Skills to be taught in the courses.

3. WIDS Software Available to All Faculty

The WIDS software, while complicated, does provide the means to link Employability Skills specifically to particular course competencies. In addition, WIDS provides the means to design specific assessments for those skills. Because GTCC has worked closely with WIDS in the past, GTCC's Employability Skills DACUM is part of the database accessible in the software. These two facts—support for assessment design and the presence of the Employability Skills DACUM in the database—hold large promise for

discipline- and syllabus-specific training for faculty in implementing soft skills assessment. That the college has “already traveled this road” will make the implementation less time consuming—certainly the principles of competency writing and assessment are widely understood.

LEARNING CENTERED COLLEGE

The college president has long been an advocate of the learning college concept. When Terry O'Banion was the featured speaker at the North Carolina Community College Instructors' Conference (a statewide event), Dr. Cameron invited Dr. O'Banion to address GTCC faculty in a private session. He accepted this invitation, and at that time, the general concepts from O'Banion's book, A Learning College for the 21st Century, were introduced to the faculty. As long ago as 1997 and 1998, Dr. Cameron provided this book and another O'Banion book, Teaching and Learning in the Community College, to GTCC staff and faculty selected to participate in the President's Leadership Institute, and the books were the subjects of follow-up meetings for those leadership institute cohorts.

The foregoing sections of this plan have addressed the Workforce Preparedness classroom initiatives that were the focus of much thinking, innovation and change in instructional practices at the college. But in 2003, there was a sense that the teaching/learning theme had wilted and needed refreshing. Opening convocations had too easily lapsed into updates on general college initiatives, on the usually dismal condition of the state budget, and on the progress of current GTCC construction projects. To renew our commitment as a college and re-focus us on the importance of being learning-centered, Dr. Cameron's opening remarks at faculty convocation in August 2003 again addressed the teaching and learning theme. In August 2003, Dr. Cameron's focus was on teaching and learning, and he renewed his challenge for the college to focus on learning and on the success of our students.

The QEP theme we have chosen certainly affirms the focus of the learning-centered college. First of all, students who can learn the basic Employability Skills will have a much better chance at learning other content. Students who are taught—and who learn—

these skills will have a far better chance to succeed in the college environment and to be successful learners. If we succeed in our QEP initiative, we would, across all campus services as well as in curriculum courses, be teaching and documenting learning of Employability Skills. This would produce students who have learned to be good communicators and problem solvers, who learned to adapt and be responsible, who can participate as effective team members and are adept at information processing (computer) skills.

O'Banion asks learning centered colleges constantly to ask these questions: Does this action improve and expand student learning? How do we know this action improves and expands student learning? This sort of learning centered questioning is beginning to take root at the college. As we think about what Employability Skills we teach to students by our own example, we are beginning to see change. Already at GTCC, we are beginning to ask, "What messages are we sending to students? How are we demonstrating the qualities (employability skills) we are expecting them to learn?" Changes have begun even before the full implementation of the QEP. For example, we asked ourselves, "Can we as a college demonstrate the expectation of responsible behavior if we allow constant exceptions to announced registration and drop/add deadlines?" A combined team of instructional and student services managers decided that the answer was a firm "No." The group then drafted a new "No Late Registration Policy," examining models, repercussions, and appropriate implementation procedures. With a summer 2004 pilot program, the message was delivered to current students, implemented, and reviewed. Full implementation is expected for fall semester 2004. Interestingly, because of the QEP, the implementation has been couched in terms of Employability Skills: How can the college reflect good communication skills? How can we help students learn responsibility?

Similarly, departments across the college have begun to ask about the specific responsibility skill identified on the Employability Skills DACUM, "Comes to work on time. Regular attendance." Are we effectively teaching this Employability Skill by routinely—at least in some departments—allowing numerous exceptions to the attendance policy or having erratic enforcement of the existing college policy? The

answer in many departments has been NO. Across the college, we are seeing increased focus on clear and enforced attendance policies, with an emphasis on linking that policy with expected workplace skills—and a focus (notably in the Mathematics Department) on gathering data suggesting that attendance enhances a student's success in the class. In short, the bottom line question was not simply about attendance and enforcement of a college policy, but about what behaviors enhance student learning.

In O'Banion's book A Learning College for the 21st Century, he lists six key principles for learning colleges. Three of these link directly to GTCC's QEP. A learning college, he says, does these things:

- Creates substantive change in the learner
- Engages learners as full partners in the learning process, with learners assuming primary responsibility for their choices
- Measures success by documented improved and expanded learning for learners.

The articulated initiative to become more learning centered will be more fully realized with the impetus of the QEP making us more accountable for achieving these worthy principles.

ACHIEVING THE DREAM

The College has applied for and received a Lumina Foundation Achieving the Dream Grant. The "Round One—Investment Grant" of \$50,000 has been awarded for year one planning (to occur during the 2004-2005 academic year), and the additional award of \$400,000 for full development of the project is pending successful year one planning. The grant projects aim to enhance student success in underserved populations by focusing on outreach, advising, and mentoring. The overall project, "Achieving the Dream," asks colleges to make "an unwavering commitment to improving student success rates for underserved students. Colleges will strengthen their capacity to assess student outcomes, set goals for improvement and track changes." The grantors challenge participating

colleges to create a “culture of evidence,” and work for sustainable, institutional change. In the grant application, the college noted its commitment to Employability Skills as institutional-level student competencies and a raised level of accountability provided by the Quality Enhancement Plan to be submitted to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

A project has already emerged from joint consideration of the Achieving the Dream proposal and the QEP: the reconstitution and revitalization of a relatively moribund Assessment Committee to take a key role in establishing a college-wide “culture of evidence.” In the past, the committee met infrequently, and it was primarily concerned with setting and analyzing placement test scores. However, that function reflects a decades-old understanding of assessment. In the current climate of accountability and continuous improvement, an Assessment Committee should be an active committee, central to the work of the college. Because of the data driven requirements of both Achieving the Dream and the QEP, that committee has been re-evaluated, its mission re-defined, and its work more clearly articulated. This new version of the committee will begin its work in the fall of 2004.

The QEP and its focus on college-wide teaching and documented learning of Employability Skills should be of particular value to at risk students. The overall goal would be, of course, to retain these students so they have a credential—a certificate, diploma, or degree. However, even with a vast improvement in graduation rates for at-risk students, the reality is that some will leave the college before program completion. Thus, constant teaching and assessment of basic Employability Skills should be a valuable asset to these students. Should they, for whatever reasons, leave the college prematurely, they will at least have been learning Employability Skills. One of the goals of Achieving the Dream is to help students achieve their individual goals, which do include obtaining a better job as well as some sort of academic completion.

Coordinating the work of the Quality Enhancement Plan with Achieving the Dream will lend force and focus to each.

SECTION 6--Specific, well-defined goals related to an issue of substance and depth, expected to lead to observable results.

At GTCC, the planning process has used these terms to define our work:

Goal—a general statement about aims or purposes

Objective—an observable, measurable target for specific action; more detailed than a goal; establishing a clear path to achieve the goal(s)

Strategy—specific, smaller step(s) to achieve the objective, in other words exactly how the objective will be achieved. The strategies should include the means to measure progress or achievement of the objective.

GOALS OF THE QEP

With those definitions in mind, we have these overall goals for our QEP:

- To become a college community that reflects and expects adaptability, communication, information processing, problem solving, responsibility, and teamwork.
- To develop a college-wide consciousness about the importance and regular practice of assessment and using the results of assessment to improve continuously the quality of all phases of our work.

Section 8 of this report details the more specific objectives and strategies, with attention to timelines, leadership, resource allocation, and assessment schedule.

SECTION 7--Evidence of careful analysis of the institutional context in which the goals will be implemented and of consideration of best practices related to the QEP's topic or issues.

Section 5 develops more fully the context into which the QEP will be implemented.

Recapping briefly, GTCC is an institution with clear commitments on a number of important initiatives: Workforce Preparedness, Performance-based Learning, Becoming a Learning Centered College, and (most recently) “Achieving the Dream,” projects linked to student access and student success funded by the Lumina Foundation.

A literature search on identifying and assessing employability skills yields more on identification of these skills and the importance of teaching them than it does on the assessment of those skills. In fact, reading literature regarding the identification and importance of adding employability skills to college curricula is extremely reaffirming. We are doing the right thing. From research work done by the US Department of Labor to work by the Canadian Government to work by the Australian Council for Education Research, there is worldwide emphasis on identifying and teaching employability skills. (See resources list for articles reviewed as part of our literature search.)

Perhaps the most widely known report on the importance of Employability Skills in the United States is the 1992 US Department of Labor produced report, Learning a Living: What Work Requires of Schools. In it, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) defined "workplace know-how," a "foundation of skills and personal qualities needed for solid job performance." The SCANS report, however, seems to have generated more ideas about what we should be teaching than ways these qualities might be taught or assessed. In fact, in a 1995 article entitled "Assessment of Behavioral Change and Performance," Mary K. Kinnick and R. Dan Walleri note that the SCANS report would increase the emphasis on the need to assess behaviors and performance that are not traditionally "academic." They acknowledge the lamentable lack of assessment in the affective domain: ". . . Some behaviors that institutions intend to—and mostly likely can and do—affect are neglected in our assessment practices." (p. 87) A colleague at the University of Texas Medical Branch, Dr. Ann W. Frye, commented that "it's extremely uncommon to find well-developed instruments or processes that are appropriately validated for the kinds of employment-related behavioral categories that we increasingly find important to assess." Dr. Frye, Associate Director of the Office of Educational Development, further commented, "I haven't found any 'best practice' literature, and I've looked, oh how I have looked." (personal correspondence, curriculum vitae <http://oed.utmb.edu/bios/BIOGRAPHICAL%20SKETCH%20%20Frye.htm>).

The initial best practices search has been both frightening and exciting. There simply is not much yet written on the assessment of Employability Skills or any sort of soft skills. The most promising work, work that parallels our own, is taking place in Australia. An article from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in Australia outlined the process in progress at the University of Ballarat. The article, “Employability Skills: A work in progress at the University of Ballarat” (Eagles and Warfe, 2003) outlines the staff development process in progress as of 2003. The overall aims of the project include “investigating current approaches to the delivery and assessment of generic skills,” embedding the skills into teaching and assessment, and “investigating ways of monitoring the effectiveness of course delivery and assessment of these skills” (page 1). The two-page summary article concludes with two statements: “Our achievements are still a work in progress,” and “Our major Employability Skills Staff Development Project is still in its infancy.” In fact, the final sentence is this: “We welcome any ‘hints’ for success from people who may have already traveled further down this road.” Indeed, so would GTCC.

In a lengthier publication from the Australian Council for Educational Research, Adele Butler, Le Luc, and Sam Hambur (June 2004) wrote up the results of their work in assessing critical thinking, interpersonal understandings, problem solving and written communication. Their instrument, the “Graduate Skills Assessment Test,” was “developed to measure a number of key generic skills of university students in their first and final year of study.” However, the assessment differs from our needs in that it assesses skills “relevant to university achievement and graduate work” (emphasis added). Nevertheless, the work done in developing the instrument and testing its validity may prove extremely helpful if the college works to develop its own measurements of Employability Skills.

If one defines dilemma as a situation with “equally unsatisfactory alternatives,” then this paucity of literature on “best practices” is indeed a dilemma. On the one hand, one hates to venture out alone without good research, good models, and supporting experiences of others. On the other hand, there is the challenge of being in the forefront of assessing

these skills. We choose to view this as an opportunity. Nationally, these skills are recognized to be ones that employers want taught, and locally, these skills are in demand by employers in Guilford County. As an institution, we took the lead and committed ten years ago to their teaching, so it is fitting that we take the lead in Employability Skills assessment.

SECTION 8--A viable implementation plan that includes necessary resources and a framework that details matters such as:

Timelines

Leadership

Resource allocation

Assessment schedule

In the initial thinking leading to the QEP theme, the planning team has been extremely concerned about creating an implementation plan that does not layer yet more work in an already challenging environment. This context is critical in understanding our primary focus for an implementation plan that integrates into existing processes, committees, departments, and initiatives rather than adding what might be perceived as yet another college-wide project. The danger of adding a major new project held the potential of devaluing the whole QEP process and making college-wide engagement and support extremely difficult. While certainly a QEP with attendant goals and projects could be mandated, we knew that such a top-down mandate was not the intent of the Southern Association. Even more important, however, was the value of truly adding quality to our college and enhancing student learning. We did not want that focus to be lost due to faculty and staff feeling simply too overburdened to add another thing to their load, or feeling disenfranchised by a “command from the top.”

Following quality principles learned during the college’s introduction to Total Quality Management principles ten years ago, we did a brief “Force Field Analysis”:

- **RESTRAINING FORCES**—what challenges do we face:
 1. Computer information system conversion.

- The college is transitioning to a new information system as mandated by the North Carolina Community College System (Datatel's Colleague). GTCC is one of eight pilot colleges and is in the throes of conversion and being a beta test site.
2. Growth without supporting resources.

The college has grown in enrollment without supporting growth in funding. In fact, the funding formula from the state of North Carolina has changed in such a way that even with enrollment growth, the college received less state funding per student and less in absolute dollars in 2003-2004. Recent remarks by an officer in the North Carolina Community College Faculty Association summarized the dilemma this way: "Over the last three years, North Carolina's community colleges have grown 17 1/2 percent in FTE. But at the same time, General Assembly cuts and Governor-required reversions have cut community college funding between 2 and 5 percent each of those same three years. Because of those cuts, funding has dropped from \$3900 per FTE to \$3400 per FTE. At the same time, equipment funding has dropped 65 percent from \$245 to \$85 per FTE."
 3. The stress of "more with less."

The North Carolina state economic climate has meant that the funding of the college has remained, at best, static. However, in many cases we have increased equipment and supply demands but no budget to fund these demands. This stresses faculty and staff to do "more with less" once again, after several years of producing "more with less."
 4. Budgetary constraints on non-instructional areas.

The "2% Transfer Rule" has particularly stretched the non-instructional areas. Where dollars, while limited, were available in instruction to add a few positions, in non-instructional areas (particularly Student Support Services), enrollment grew while the actual size of the staff to deal with these increasing numbers of students and the burden of the Colleague conversion was static or shrinking.
 5. "Sprawling mission."

By virtue of being a community college in North Carolina, the college is charged with a mission that spans basic skills to college transfer, 'quick training' programs

to full technical degree programs, community interest courses to employment training/re-certification courses.

6. Unfulfilled previous initiatives.

The college has experienced a number of not fully actualized prior themes or initiatives such as the Learning College, Total Quality Management (Building Quality Together), and an initiative focused on better internal communications. Whether the problem has been timing of an initiative when resources were not available, inadequate attention to follow-up, poorly defined objectives, or something else, we do not want the QEP to fall into the category of “the next thing.”

7. Sensitivity to lack of buy-in.

Lastly, in part due to some incomplete work on the themes listed above, we wanted to be sensitive to suspicion about the potential emptiness of “academic buzzwords” and trends—student success, creating community, excellence, learning college, retention. While each of these can be of significant concern for any college, the terms can also sound hollow and meaningless.

- DRIVING FORCES—what strengths do we have:

1. For the most part, GTCC faculty and staff are committed and even passionate about what they do and care deeply about students and each other.
2. A strong student-centered focus emerged as a central theme from all focus groups, both instructional and non-instructional.
3. Keen interest in improvement of institutional quality—academics and services—emerged from focus groups.
4. Community/advisory committee/business-industry demand employees with better “soft skills,” which the business-industry community has worked with GTCC to identify.
5. Achieving the Dream’s opportunity exhorts us to create institutional change to help foster student success and emphasizes “data-driven change.”

6. The college has an existing goal linked to the Mission: “GTCC will identify and measure desired outcomes both in the operation of the college and in the classroom.”
7. A strong, budget-linked, performance-measured planning process familiar to all college constituencies through seven years of use.

The force field analysis highlighted an understanding of our “present scene.” We also firmly supported our earlier and ongoing commitments to Workforce Preparedness, Performance-based Learning, Becoming a Learning Centered College, and the upcoming Lumina Foundation supported project “Achieving the Dream.” Therefore, GTCC proposes to integrate fully the theme of the QEP into the ongoing work of the college. This means that all the work of the college will reinforce the two major goals of the QEP:

- To become a college community that reflects and expects adaptability, communication, information processing, problem solving, responsibility, and teamwork.
- To develop a college-wide consciousness about the importance and regular practice of assessment and using the results of assessment to improve continuously the quality of all phases of our work.

To that end, in many ways the timelines, leadership, resource allocation, and assessment schedule should parallel many of the existing processes at the college. Is this a classic “cop out”? No. The infusion of the QEP into existing college processes will force us to a new level of progress and accountability. We believe our initiatives and processes are good. In the past, the college has not done as thorough a job of ongoing assessment as it might have done. Infusing the goals of the QEP into our existing framework will take us to the next level: college-wide attention to accountability, assessment, and ongoing improvement all focused on student learning.

First, we must report to SACS over the next five to ten years on observable, measurable quality enhancement that improves student learning. Each college department, process, committee, and activity will plan and act not only to expect and/or reflect Employability Skills, each area will also need to be mindful that processes and outcomes will need

documentation. Everyone will focus on measuring student learning of Employability Skills.

Secondly, the intent of Achieving the Dream is also to use existing processes to implement data-driven change. We will now have accountability to the Lumina Foundation, with clear mandates to implement change, monitor progress, and “develop a culture of evidence and accountability.”

A general beginning framework for projects is as follows:

Year 1 Projects: Setting the context, laying the ground work

- Assessment of current status of curriculum soft skills assessment
- Marketing campaign—expect/reflect campaign
- Campus-wide committee charge
- Follow-up on QEP objectives from 2004-05 planning units
- Revision of faculty staff survey instrument
- Review assessment in non-instructional areas

Year 2 Projects: Looking at national help

- Look at models for soft-skill assessment
- Explore models for assessing soft-skills delivered through non-instructional services
- Explore nationally-normed assessment instrument options—CCSSE, for example
- Explore developing our own instrument

Year 3 Projects: Fine tuning the routine

- Revise the Employability Skills chart/DACUM
- Implement specific Employability Skills measurements
- Assess success of Employability Skills measurements
- Implement changes to strengthen less-successful areas

Year one projects could be detailed as follows:

(See narrative below for details of objectives/specific strategies)

<i>Start up date</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Leadership</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Fall 2004	1. Marketing Campaign-- Reflect and Expect Employability Skills	Wilson/QEP team members	\$7,000	Survey of awareness
Fall 2004	2. Assessment of current status of curriculum employability skills assessment	Academic Team	None	Chart of current status-- by program
August 2004	3. Follow-up on QEP- related planning unit objectives	Schneider/May	None	Chart of objectives, suggestions, notification; mid year follow up.
Fall 2004	4. Planning for appropriate professional development activities based on QEP objectives (e.g. cooperative learning for teamwork; faculty consultant program for communication)	Amos, Gress (for faculty consultant program)	\$5,000— prof. dev. \$9,720.00-- faculty consultants	Schedule of offerings, evaluation by participants; follow-up survey on application of concepts in classrooms.
Fall 2004	5. Implement plans for Great College Retreat to improve campus communication and teamwork	Academic Team (division chairs)	\$ 10,000 estimated	Evaluation by participants; point of contact surveys for staff/faculty using campus services
Fall 2004	6. Charge to all campus wide committees to implement 2004-05 objective related to QEP	President's Council	None	End of year reports from committee chairs about specific results of their objective
Fall 2004	7. On-going use of Planning Process to generate at least one objective linked to the QEP	IRP office/Abell	None	Review by Institutional Effectiveness Committee; End-of-Year reports on progress on all objectives.
Spring 2004	8. On-going use of the annual performance appraisal process and instrument to reinforce reflection of employability skills	HR Office/Jackson	None	(Documentation of improvement via Staff Survey)
May 2005	9. Begin college-wide/unit- appropriate development of assessment strategies	Assessment committee*	None	Assessment instruments (to be reviewed by Committee)

*Note: The Assessment Committee as currently constituted will be revamped to reflect the need for a more comprehensive and consistent focus on assessment across the college. With support from Achieving the Dream funds, members of the committee (part of the Achieving the Dream's "Learning Evidence and Data Team") will attend a regional workshop to learn about specifics of gathering and analyzing evidence of learning. Again, the coupling of the QEP with an important campus initiative will strengthen both projects.

YEAR ONE OBJECTIVES FOR THE QEP

OBJECTIVE 1: To raise college awareness of the QEP theme, of its integral role in informing all phases of our work—in the classroom, in college offices, on all college campuses. This would exemplify the Employability Skills of Teamwork and Communication.

Strategies:

Develop a plan similar to a marketing or advertising campaign, with specific strategies, timelines, expenses, and assessments of effectiveness. This would take the shape of a general marketing/awareness campaign to make everyone at the college—students, faculty, and staff alike--aware of the QEP and the “new environment” in which we all are now working. This project would include such activities as

- Transform the current “Caught in the Act of Caring” process to a “Reflect and Expect” campaign to reward college employees who reflect the Employability Skills in a noteworthy way. Develop a specific nominating process by which these employees would be selected, and design/order pins or other visible means to honor these employees. The purpose would be to honor employees of the college and to raise awareness about the importance of reflecting the employability skills we expect our students to learn.
- Use college advertising/marketing/publication tools as a means to inform everyone on campus of the raised expectations regarding the teaching, learning, and assessment of Employability Skills. This might include the development of a slogan and logo (also to be used in the “Reflect and Expect” campaign).
- Create a long-range plan to sustain college-wide awareness of the QEP in particular with Employability Skills as the focus. This might include highlighting one Employability Skill per year, with professional development and annual evaluations geared to developing and assessing improvement in those areas for both employees and students.

OBJECTIVE 2: To assess the “state of the college” in our curriculum assessment of soft skills.

Strategies:

1. Appoint the Academic Team (management group) to gather information on current practice for assessing Employability Skills in academic courses and programs. Possible examples would be
 - a. Soft skill assessments/rubrics from clinic settings
 - b. Co-operative Education workbooks
 - c. Capstone course syllabi/assessments—Office Systems Technology, Architectural Technology, Advertising/Graphic Design for example.
2. Create a list of programs without specific measurements of Employability Skills instruction.
3. Work with department chairs on developing a plan to help those programs find ways to assess employability skills in courses/programs.
4. Gather data on soft skill assessment from existing Institutional Planning and Research Office instruments such as Graduate Exit Survey, Graduate Follow-up Report, Report on GTCC Students’ Satisfaction Ratings with Employability Skills, 2002-2003.

OBJECTIVE 3: Follow up on QEP-related planning objectives from 2004-2005 Planning Units.

Strategies:

1. Review QEP-related planning objectives.
2. Revise as needed, particularly to assure clear deadlines and measures.
3. Return all objectives, particularly revised ones, to each department to remind them to implement for 2004-2005.
4. Assess progress through End-of-Year Reports to Institutional Research and Planning Process.

OBJECTIVE 4: To provide professional development and support where common themes emerge from QEP-linked objectives in the planning units.

Strategies:

1. Analyze QEP planning unit objectives, and emerging needs/successes in assessing student learning of employability skills to find specific areas for peer support or professional development.
2. Review literature and best practices. Targeted literature searches and attention to “best practices” will help identify models for assessment of soft skills and training could be brought to faculty for implementation at GTCC.
3. Work with Professional Development Office on college-wide access to specific training for units identifying a common objective in their planning documents. For example, this past year’s planning units showed several academic departments identifying “teamwork” as an Employability Skill they hoped to have students learn. To support this objective, the college might then provide some specific training (cooperative learning, for example) that helps faculty teach group/social skills and training on assessing learning of these “soft skills.”
4. Develop/provide staff training opportunities that will be necessary as employees learn to view their work in the learning community differently. These opportunities would serve employees across functional lines, and in part would involve what might be termed “customer service training” to help staff be better “reflectors” of the Employability Skills with internal and external customers. Staff from across non-instructional units would be trained in viewing their work as part of the educational process that has an impact on student learning and in the assessment of that learning.

OBJECTIVE 5: To foster more effective communication and teamwork among faculty and staff, implement plans already formulated for the Great College Retreat.

Strategies:

1. Renew request for approval and funding to President’s Council.

2. Work with campus representative of the Great College Movement to integrate QEP theme into the processes of the retreat.
3. Assess effectiveness of retreat as means to improve campus communication and teamwork with evaluation by participants.

OBJECTIVE 6: To infuse college processes with the central focus of “reflecting and expecting Employability Skills” and with making specific progress on enhancing student learning of the employability skills and assessment of that learning.

Strategies (to be done by the QEP Team):

1. Develop an “orientation package” for presentation at early meetings of all college-wide committees (fall 2004). This package should include revisiting the QEP process and theme and providing sample committee QEP-related projects or tasks.
2. Require all committees to submit a QEP task proposal for the academic year, with a required year-end report on progress toward that objective, submitted to President’s Council.
3. Review other college groups/processes for doing QEP-related orientation and project assignment for those groups. For example:
 - Institutional Research and Planning Office will examine and revise the Staff Survey to provide better assessment of staff “reflecting” Employability Skills.
 - Institutional Research and Planning Office will explore options for nationally-normed assessment instrument for use college-wide, working in coordination with the Achieving the Dream project.
 - Academic Team (the division chairs and campus deans) will implement College Excellence Retreat to enhance college commitment to and demonstration of Teamwork. This retreat, modeled on the Great Teacher Seminar format, is designed to foster teamwork, stimulate the exchange of information, and re-focus and re-energize people to improve performance.

OBJECTIVE 7: To continue college-wide involvement in implementing the QEP through GTCC's annual planning process, allowing buy in at the department/planning unit level.

Strategies:

1. Each unit—not only instructional units—will consider its role in helping students learn the employability skills and annually write at least one specific, cost-neutral objective that they hope to implement to help achieve the larger college goal of assessing employability skills.
2. Each unit will identify specific strategies towards that objective.
3. Each unit will be held accountable for its progress towards its objective in the annual End of Year Report that asks all units to report on their progress toward the objectives from the planning unit.
4. The planning objectives linked to the QEP will be pulled out from the larger planning documents, and the Institutional Effectiveness Council will evaluate them for their strengths and weaknesses and examine them for any college-wide trends or concerns related to the QEP. The IEC and the QEP team will annually review these objectives to determine possible directions for college-wide professional development activities.

OBJECTIVE 8: To emphasize the use of the annual college Evaluation Appraisal Process (EAP) and instrument to reinforce employees' reflection of Employability Skills.

Strategies:

1. Examine faculty-staff satisfaction surveys from the Institutional Research and Planning Office to assess areas where improvement might be warranted.
2. Highlight areas on the EAP instrument that will target improvement in Employability Skills that address issues from the survey.
3. Assess need for possible areas for professional development. For example, provide customer service training (or similar professional development) for employees who may need improvement in the communication area.

OBJECTIVE 9: Begin college-wide/unit appropriate development of assessment strategies, working in cooperation with the Achieving the Dream planning team.

Strategies:

1. Reconstitute Assessment Committee (formerly concerned primarily with setting placement test scores) to charge it with developing a plan for college-wide consciousness about the importance and regular practice of assessment and using the results of assessment to improve continuously the quality of all phases of our work.
2. Work with the newly-created Teaching/Learning Institute to provide training sessions on in-class assessments.
3. Develop a plan of action to help non-instructional areas become more assessment oriented.

SECTION 9--A comprehensive evaluation plan clearly related to the QEP goals with the latitude and flexibility to make adjustments to achieve the desired student learning outcomes.

The immediate evaluation plan to assess progress toward QEP goals is to use the existing structure of the college-wide planning process. This process begins in each unit, and each unit annually states specific objectives linked to the college's general initiatives. Starting in fall 2003, the planning process required that each unit develop a specific objective for 2004-2005 linked to the college's QEP.

The first step in evaluating these planning objectives was review by the Institutional Effectiveness Council, the committee charged with implementing the planning process. That committee did this review at their April meeting. Because the QEP-related objectives are so significant in the college's commitment to the enhancement of our college quality, these objectives were reviewed a second time. In this review, each unit was evaluated for these characteristics:

- Link to a specific Employability Skill
- Clear statement of a specific objective
- Clear strategies to implement towards the objective
- Specific statement of the means to measure attainment of the objective

Each unit then received specific feedback on their QEP-related objective. In some cases, this notification revised the unit's objective so that it would be a more attainable one. In all cases, the notification served as a reminder of the unit's QEP-related plans for the year. It is our plan to include a QEP-linked objective annually for the next five to ten years. We will also include IEC review and revision of QEP-linked objectives as a part of the planning process. This evaluation will help ensure that QEP objectives are clearly linked to an Employability Skill, clearly written, and clearly measurable.

This IEC review will also help monitor trends or common themes that emerge from the planning units as they articulate QEP-related objectives. The IEC can serve as a clearinghouse to assess what college-wide interests or needs are emerging. This function will allow the college to respond flexibly and make appropriate adjustments to working on the QEP college-wide.

Equally important in the evaluation of the QEP will be specific accountability to meeting objectives. In the case of objectives identified in the planning process, evaluation is a part of the annual process. Every year, each unit compiles a "Year End Report" documenting its progress on its stated objectives.

In addition to the college's planning process, each project undertaken in the name of the QEP will be required to build in a specific plan that includes assessment and evaluation of the success of the project. This component is vital because one of the larger goals of the QEP states, "To develop a college-wide consciousness about the importance and regular practice of assessment and using the results of assessment in all phases of our work." The SACS Leadership Team and the QEP team will need to develop specific mechanisms that insure that the program- and department-specific assessments of learning are active processes that routinely enhance student learning.

Other specific assessments will grow from the mandated processes of the Lumina Grant. As mentioned, the project requires that the college create a culture of evidence. Because

that grant has just been awarded, it will be possible for the Lumina project leaders to work together with the QEP team in assuring that data is being gathered and that it is data that is driving decisions.

Of course, the most important assessment will need to address these questions:

- Have students demonstrably learned adaptability, communication, information processing, problem solving, responsibility, and teamwork?
- Have our efforts to improve the teaching and learning of employability skills enhanced student learning?
- How do we know?
- What improvements have we made based on what we know?

In its “Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning,” The American Association for Higher Education has this as its first principle: “The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.” Clearly, the college has this beginning in place. We do value student learning and the Employability Skills. The challenge for us will be in developing useful, meaningful assessments that become a part of our culture.

SECTION 10--Appendices, if applicable

For section 4:

Documentation of the process:

- QEP development time line
- List of focus group questions, facilitator guide
- Summary provided by IRP office

For section 7:

Literature search

- Resources list/bibliography

For section 8:

Objective 5 Great College Retreat

- Great College Retreat proposal

QEP Development Process

- **QEP Development Timeline**
- **QEP Facilitator Guide, Questions**
- **Summary of Focus Group Results**

<i>Quality Enhance Plan Development Process</i>	
Target Date	Activity
Jan. 2003	Review planning units to identify possible trends that emerge for the “one thing” for success.
	Use trends identified to create a draft of protocol (questions to be used) for sample college population focus groups.
<i>Jan. 17, 2003</i>	Identify participants for one or two field test groups from representatives of the various college sample groups identified.
<i>Jan. 17, 2003</i>	Identify additional focus group facilitators if needed.
<i>Jan. 24, 2003</i>	Create information “brochure” to distribute to all campus folks---What is SACS? What ISN'T SACS?
<i>Jan. 31, 2003</i>	Identify specific sampling groups that should have the opportunity to provide input---faculty (academic, technical B&I), professional staff, administrative staff, etc.
<i>Jan. 31, 2003</i>	Identify how identified sample college population representatives will be determined.
<i>Jan. 31, 2003</i>	Contact additional focus group facilitators as required and alert to training/project.
<i>Feb. 7, 2003</i>	Distribute SACS information to all campus.
<i>Feb. 7, 2003</i>	Plan and execute a training session for focus group facilitators to calibrate managing the pilot sessions.
<i>Feb. 17, 2003</i>	Conduct field test of protocol for one or two field groups.
<i>Feb. 21, 2003</i>	Analyze responses from field test groups and use analysis to “tweak” protocol.
<i>Feb. 28, 2003</i>	Send a college-wide explanation of the group’s task/quest for the “one thing” and the rationale to “sell” and motivate this project as valid to the college’s success because there is a vested interest for each member of the college.
<i>Feb. 28, 2003</i>	Contact/schedule focus groups and participants.
<i>March 17 – April 17</i>	Conduct focus groups for sample college populations.
<i>April 15, 2003</i>	Analyze focus group responses to create a response instrument to distribute to all college units for input.
<i>April 18, 2003</i>	Meet with each college “unit” to explain the rationale for the task and to reinforce their needed/serious input, as well as generate enthusiasm for the process. Also, provide instrument to each unit to gain feedback to focus group analysis.
	Analyze unit responses.
<i>April 30, 2003</i>	Finalize “one thing” that emerged and distribute information to all college units.

Focus Groups
Quality Enhancement Plan
SACS Re-Accreditation
Guilford Technical Community College
Spring 2003

QEP Background

In the new SACS accreditation process, Guilford Tech will submit a number of documents in place of the former "self-study." These documents will be used as a basis for review by both off-site and on-site peer review committees. One such document is the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

"The QEP is a unifying theme for a course of action for institutional improvement that addresses one or more issues that contribute to institutional quality, with special attention to student learning...In preparing the QEP, an institution is expected to engage the wider academic community in a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the effectiveness of the learning environment to support student learning and to accomplish the mission of the institution." (SACS Principles of Accreditation)

Focus Groups

Purpose: To analyze the effectiveness of the learning environment to support student learning and to accomplish the mission of the institution.)

Outcome: Determine unifying theme of QEP before end of Spring 2003 semester

Prior to Focus Groups

- Review planning units to identify possible trends that emerge for the "one thing" for success.
- Use trends identified to create a draft of protocol (questions to be used) for sample college population focus groups.
- Identify participants for one or two field test groups from representatives of the various college sample groups identified.
- Identify additional focus group facilitators if needed.
- Create information "brochure" to distribute to all campus folks---What is SACS? What Isn't SACS?
- Identify specific sampling groups that should have the opportunity to provide input---faculty (academic, technical B&I), professional staff, administrative staff, etc.
- Identify how identified sample college population representatives will be determined.

- Contact additional focus group facilitators as required and alert to training/project.
- Distribute SACS information to all campus.
- Plan and execute a training session for focus group facilitators to calibrate managing the pilot sessions.

Pilot and Work Unit Focus Groups

- Conduct field test of protocol for three pilot groups.
- Analyze responses from pilot focus groups and use analysis to “tweak” protocol.
- Send a college-wide explanation of the group’s task/quest for the “one thing” and the rationale to “sell” and motivate this project as valid to the college’s success because there is a vested interest for each member of the college.
- Contact/schedule focus groups and participants.
- Conduct focus groups for sample college populations.

After Focus Groups

- Analyze focus group responses to create a response instrument to distribute to all college units for input.
- Meet with each college unit individually or in combination with others (8-12 people in a meeting) to explain the rationale for the task and to reinforce their needed/serious input, as well as generate enthusiasm for the process. Also, provide instrument to each unit to gain feedback to focus group analysis.
- Analyze unit responses.
- Finalize “one thing” that emerged and distribute information to all college units.

Methodology

1. Focus groups will be conducted with faculty and staff Each pilot focus group will be comprised of 8-12 employees.
2. The length of each focus group will be one hour.
3. Each facilitator will explain the purpose and procedures of the focus group, ask the questions as printed, and review the main points.
4. Each recorder will submit a typed summary of the group’s discussion to his/her facilitator.
5. Each facilitator will combine the 2 sets of notes and email the summary to the focus group for review.
6. With the focus group’s approval, each facilitator will email summaries to QEP chair.
7. The QEP chair will compile the summaries.
8. Research associate, Sabrina Ross-Griffin, will review the data and submit a report to the QEP team.
9. The report, with recommendations from the committee, will be presented to the SACS Leadership Team, and additional groups as needed.

Questions

1. What does this group have in common that supports the college mission?
(GTCC Mission Statement: *Guilford Technical Community College provides lifelong learning opportunities for personal growth, workforce productivity, and community service. We serve all the diverse segments of Guilford County's population, delivering quality educational programs and services, through partnerships with business, community groups, and other educational institutions.*)
2. How does this group's work relate to the learning environment? What impact do you have on learning?
3. How does your work connect with others on campus to help students learn?
4. If your group could work on ONE THING to help students learn, what would it be? What else would you like to share that you think would enhance student learning and/or the learning environment at GTCC?

QEP Themes

Items 1 – 3 are lists of themes that were mentioned by two or more groups. The number of times the theme was mentioned is listed in parenthesis. Item 4 contains the actual comments made by group members, categorized by themes and sub-themes. Again, the number of times each theme/sub-theme was mentioned is listed in parenthesis.

Themes

- 1. What does this group have in common that supports the college mission?**
 - Serve a diverse population (13)
 - Contribute to lifelong learning (8)
 - Encourage workforce preparedness/productivity skills (8)
 - Encourage development of various other skills (6)
 - Encourage personal growth/development (4)
 - Advising (2)

- 2. How does this group's work relate to the learning environment? What impact do you have on learning?**
 - Help students develop various skills (5)
 - Demonstrate politeness, courtesy, pleasantness and/or welcoming environment to students (5)
 - Provide personal growth opportunities (2)
 - Encourage workforce productivity/employability skills (3)
 - Adapt to diverse student learning styles (2)
 - Provide counseling/advising (4)

- 3. How does your work connect with others on campus to help students learn?**
 - Participate in student advising (7)
 - Provide guidance and relay information to students (6)
 - Help students develop necessary skills (3)

Actual Comments

- 4. If your group could work on ONE THING to help students learn, what would it be? What else would you like to share that you think would enhance student learning and/or the learning environment at GTCC?**
 - A. Technology/Upgrades (9)**
 - Provide up to date technology.
 - Increase use of technology in both the classroom and lab areas to enhance information available and student ability to reference needed information.
 - Instructor material (syllabi, lesson plans, and program guides) would be updated to reflect the increased use of technology through new software programs and Internet.
 - Modern facilities at all GTCC campuses.

- Dependable access to current technology.
- Keeping up with technology.
- Provide adequate resources – equipment, supplies, and personnel.
- Have a computer system that works.
- GTCC in general – New equipment needed to keep up with technology, increase bio lab, need better facilities.

B. Customer Service/Communication (23)

- Day to day treatment of people should be improved.
- We must provide good customer service by observing those tasks and responsibilities that should be reasonably expected, such as providing good advising and accurate information to students, being available as stated, addressing students' concerns/needs effectively and respectfully.
- Fund the administrative piece that helps support students and 'get them on track' – counseling, disability services, advising.
- Intake Center so there is one clear place for students to go and find what they need – and one place central to take calls and process information.
- Smoother registration – students better treated, one location, people working the lines to make sure students are in the right place.
- Customer service – offices should be consistent and open during registration, with synchronized hours.
- Customer service – we have to do a better job because we have COMPETITION—students can go to other colleges. We are often compared with others, so we have to do better.
- There is a fine line between customer service and responsibility. No one strives to give bad customer service. However, in the process of learning responsibility, it might be perceived that way (when you are upset/not getting your way, you probably aren't going to realize that the person is, in fact, trying to help you). There is a rude way and a polite way to tell a student “no”, and everyone just needs to make sure they use the polite route.
- Channel and organize registration for efficiency and correctness at the front end of the college process.
- Cross train faculty and staff.
- Communication.
- When faculty and staff don't follow instructions, we look the other way rather than telling them they must do it correctly.
- Better communication – between academic side and student services side of the house – e.g. admissions often don't know what programs have been changed or cancelled; switchboard doesn't know what classes have been cancelled for the semester, night students don't get good communication from GTCC.
- Improve campus communication – better customer service skills for all GTCC employees; better understanding of all campuses and organizational structure of the college.
- Better college-wide communication and collaboration.

- Faculty doesn't know what is available from us. Get the word out.
- Short, simple, clear instructions for faculty on how to do the things they want or need. Better instructions, simple, complete.
- Have better communication between departments on campus (Counseling, Finance, etc.) in order to facilitate instruction and activities.
- Communication system (perhaps computer-based) that would help students with locating areas and procedures as to how to register or receive a transcript...just general information that seems to be confusing students.
- Overall we feel communication is one of the key factors for a better enhancement plan.
- Better signs. Students can't find their way to what they need.
- We need a clearer understanding of how to get a student to the right place on the first try – e.g., Con. Ed registration. There should be clearer information to students about what all is involved in registration.
- More internal communication on things that we need to have and know to do our jobs well. This is a huge frustration.

C. Classroom (21)

1). Smaller class sizes (5)

- Instructor/student ratio 12:1 for lab classes.
- Smaller classes.
- Reduce class size so teachers can have more one-on-one connection with students.
- More teachers, smaller classrooms.
- Faculty: student ratio in clinic groups too large in NUR 110 for development of foundation skills.

2). Cohort/learning community system (2)

- Encourage the development of learning communities (e.g., through linked classes).
- Explore the possibility of developing an evening and day 'cohort' system.

3). Classroom and/or course improvements (11)

- More open lab facilities for students.
- Larger classrooms (Davis Hall particularly, renovations NEEDED!).
- Incorporate more real life simulations in courses.
- Upgrade labs continuously to industry standards.
- Enough classes offered to accommodate students who want to enroll.
- Faculty release time for enhancing faculty skills is a luxury – we have one slot per semester and need more to stay current.
- Expand the math lab hours and fully staff the math lab.
- Increase availability to students through online enhancements.
- More on-line courses.
- Make sure we offer all classes, services in a variety of ways.
- Internationalize the curriculum so students can find their place in a world culture.

4). Misc. (3)

- More consistent quality classroom instruction.
- More opportunities should be provided for faculty development.
- Courses for paid faculty training should be provided outside the academic year (to reduce time faculty are taken away from students).

D. Students (61)**1). Enhance student skills (22)**

- Provide an environment that teaches students social/life skills.
- Work with public schools to make high school students more successful, and better prepare them for college and avoiding developmental education classes.
- Work on retention – and the many areas that make that happen – like attendance, graduation rates, and embedded skills from other areas so students can succeed, enforcing prerequisites.
- We must find a way to improve student study skills and emphasize that they must take responsibility for their own education, such as meeting deadlines and accepting the consequences of one's actions or inactions. We should establish a "College 101" class for new students that teaches skills for studying and taking tests.
- Teaching students on campus study skills and responsibility.
- Better preparation of study skills, time management, and computer training before entering the program.
- Students should be assisted with study skills and personal management skills.
- Encourage information use and evaluation to enable students to make sound life-long decisions.
- Personal responsibility for their own actions.
- Critical thinking and reasoning skills.
- Teach students to respect school property and stop being so messy – this would allow for a better learning environment.
- Students need to take responsibility for their own business. The world does not revolve around them. Are we molding responsibility? We are not always responsible ourselves and we too often let them off the hook.
- Students need to be better prepared for basic college requirements such as test taking, critical thinking and problem solving, study skills, reading comprehension, writing skills, grammar, taking ownership of their learning, being on time and in attendance to class.
- A study skills program would benefit most, if not all, oncoming students.
- Encourage students to prioritize and be more responsible.
- Offer study skills courses for students, as needed.
- Have students have more access to on-line help and help facilitate the students to become more independent.
- More student responsibility and accountability.

- Everyone should focus on “WHY ARE YOU HERE?” and help students become more goal oriented.
- Increase student literacy, vocabulary.
- Maturity in our students.
- Abstract and critical thinking skills.

2). Student orientation needed (6)

- More support for the diverse kinds of students we have – particularly international students who may not be appropriately placed in curriculum classes. Maybe have some sort of orientation course or transition course.
- Mandatory student orientation.
- Student orientation of college-wide resources and services required
- Orientation for all students.
- Initiate a student orientation program at the beginning of the school year.
- ORIENTATION – less of a ‘conveyer belt’ approach to advising/registration/first classes. Students are not prepared for college, and we need to help them adjust.

3). Spend more time with/ focus more on students (6)

- More personal advising and connection with students – calling ones who drop, connecting with ones with problems, more individual attention in general.
- Faculty needs more time with students.
- More feedback from students and to students.
- Decreased faculty workload would allow more time to work with students.
- More opportunity to focus on student needs (i.e.,) study habits, course development. A better balance of workload would allow faculty to be more student centered.
- Additional staffing, especially a full-time Con. Ed. Coordinator would allow faculty to spend more time with students.

4). Improve student activities and/or facilities (5)

- Increase student social activities on campus.
- We need a student union to include a larger game room, an area for performers a study lounge for groups, and a coffee bar.
- Pregnant people in class need special parking.
- Mentoring program.
- Add a mentoring component – help first-time college attenders by partnering them with an experienced student.

5). Change conceptualization of students, expectations of students and/or value of students (6)

- A student is a student is a student – no distinctions among Con. Ed, Occ. Ed., and curriculum.

- Focus less on students as an FTE and more on helping students needs (Con. Ed. FTE generating formula may mean those students are not as 'valuable' to the college).
- Raise the bar – raise our expectations for ourselves, expecting employees to have the employability skills, and then expecting the students to follow this modeling.
- Students taking responsibility for their own learning.
- If we as a college set higher expectations, the students will follow.
- Be more prompt, stick to deadlines...we seem to encourage non-responsibility with our students (example, moving drop dates, work study timesheets need to be on time or no pay).

6). Alter or enhance teaching methodology (2)

- Provide students with a sense of relevance beyond the classroom with field trips, hands-on learning experiences, life long learning courses, etc.
- We need to close the gap between traditional teaching methodology and the high-tech, short-attention span nature of many of our students.

7). More money for students (2)

- Financial aid to more people.
- More scholarships for college transfer students.

8). Misc. (12)

- This group feels strongly that final exam week should be instituted for the college transfer programs. Having finals the last week of class can overwhelm students who can end up having seven exams in one day. A final exam week would better prepare the students to transfer to four-year institutions.
- We should work to reduce the disparities in academic expectations among different departments.
- Make the college more inviting, from first contact to the classroom – lower the intimidation factor for those who may not be familiar or comfortable in the college environment.
- Make retention a priority – any student who leaves us is a loss – and any student who graduates helps us shine.
- RETENTION. Helping students meet their goals.
- More emphasis and follow-through o professional development plans.
- Target high school kids with career options more consistently.
- Identify stumbling blocks to success.
- Less writing on the walls – removal of this type of student would probably allow for less disruptive nature in class.
- Since classes require calculators, make them available at reasonable prices; establish a calculator purchase option for students to provide a lower cost to them.
- Educate parents as well – their expectations are not always realistic.
- Motivate students.

E. Advising (4)

- Coherent, structured, student-centered advising.
- Quality academic advising (with appropriate training) for our students.
- Advising – doing a better job of helping students to get in the right places.
- ADVISING. This is critical – right classes, a connection with one person on campus, establish GOALS for students- more educational planning vs. academic advising.

F. Efficiency (5)

- Processes take too much time; inefficiency and/or incompetence in some areas only creates more work for people.
- Simplify overly complicated processes that detract from our mission.
- Get people to plan better.
- College-wide focus on assessment – course level, service areas, etc. – so that we are single-minded about evaluating what we do and making improvements.
- Enhance our on-line services and processes. Too much paperwork and too much paper—too much running around.

G. One College (4)

- Really work on the one college concept, making this a college where everyone feels a part of the whole – curriculum, basic skills, cont. ed., tech, and transfer. Break down the barriers.
- Be more active in promoting the realization of the ‘one college’ concept.
- Hate the ‘different sides of the house’ expression. Stressed different philosophical issues when there may not be. Pervasive attitude from the top down. We are split yet we are supposed to be a community of education.
- Too many students do a “scavenger hunt” of courses and don’t have a vision of a whole academic experience, a “common enterprise”. A campus-wide theme would help.

Resources List

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Great College Retreat

Initial Proposal

TO: Linda Thomas-Glover, Kathy Baker Smith

FROM: Carolyn Schneider

SUBJ: Great College Retreat Proposal

DATE: March 18, 2004

PROPOSAL

GTCC sponsor a Great Colleges Retreat for 30-35 employees representing a cross section of all functions and departments in the fall, 2004.

BACKGROUND

The Academic Team had discussed the possibility of hosting some sort of “staff appreciation event to help foster a stronger sense of community between the instructional division and other divisions on campus. While some sort of luncheon or late afternoon “ice cream social” type of event was our first thought, we also realized that such an event might have little impact on a more long-term and more deeply felt spirit of change among divisions. In addition, these concerns had been expressed:

- We work in separate groups and teams, but overall, GTCC employees do not function as a team.
- Growing sense of “separation” among various campus departments and functions.
- QEP focus groups’ consistent mention of a lack of cooperation and positive support among college services and departments.
- QEP mandate to work on and demonstrate employability skills: TEAMWORK.
- Need for an ongoing process to form a stronger sense of community and support at the college.

The Academic Team wholeheartedly supports this project as an important beginning in enhancing GTCC’s sense of commitment and community.

DETAILS

Timing:

The retreat would involve two days away from campus, with two overnights. One possible model is to use late Wednesday (after the working day) for arrival, with sessions that night, all day Thursday, and half of Friday.

Facilities:

The best locations would be away from GTCC, with overnight “conference” facilities—for example, Camp Caraway or Browns Summit. Each of these is designed for such meetings and provides comfortable overnight accommodations, all meals, and meeting rooms.

Format:

The Great College Seminar format would be used, i.e. each participant would bring a one paragraph paper describing a successful approach or technique AND a one paragraph describing a work-related problem to be solved. In addition, participants are asked to bring a book to share—just one paragraph from a book that has had professional or personal importance. The seminar proceeds based on small group interaction based on these materials. Trained facilitators are used, but no experts or outside consultants are used in this process.

Cost:

(estimates—which I am working on being more specific)

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| • Travel for facilitators: (from in state) | \$ 200.00 |
| • Travel/fee for primary facilitator | \$2,000.00 |
| • Conference facility:
(40* people @ \$62.00 per night), meals incl.) | \$4,960.00 |
| • Travel for GTCC participants—possibly mileage from here | \$ 100.00 |
| • TOTAL: | \$ 7,260.00 |

*includes facilitators and 30+ from GTCC