Be Prepared for the Opportunity: Foundations, Information Literacy, and a QEP

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What makes a university "officially" a university? It's not enough to hire some teachers, pick a mascot, plant some ivy on the walls or build an ivory tower or two. In order for a college degree to be meaningful in the marketplace and with fellow institutions, the institution needs to be accredited.

Trinity University is a selective, Master's level liberal arts school in San Antonio, TX, with an FTE of approximately 2500 students. What makes Trinity "officially" a university is that it is a member of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a regional educational accreditation agency. Trinity undergoes an accreditation evaluation every 10 years by SACS to make sure it meets acceptable levels of education quality. As part of its most recent ten-year reaffirmation of accreditation (which occurred in 2009), Trinity was required to create and implement a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

What is a QEP?

You may have heard the term already: at a conference, in an article, or read about it on ILI-L listserv, but what *is* a QEP? In prior, pre-QEP, iterations of the reaffirmation of accreditation, all the institutions in the Southern Association essentially focused on what we call "bean counting." Every university in the country needs to provide data - lots of data - about a lot of things to accreditation bodies and those of us in the SACS are no exception. For example, we are asked to provide the credentials of our entire faculty, data regarding student enrollment and retention, classes taught, copies of syllabi, and the list goes on. In the prior reaffirmation round in 1999, Trinity had to provide answers to 144 "must" statements. Essentially, it was about quantifying a lot of work that everyone at Trinity does. This time around, SACS wanted to do things a little differently. Yes, there was still quite a bit of bean counting, which is now called a "compliance certification." But, more important for our discussion here, was a new opportunity that SACS instituted - the QEP.

A Quality Enhancement Plan can be anything a university dreams up and can achieve on a sufficiently broad topic of the university's choosing. Thus, a QEP is forward-looking, while a compliance certification can be

considered backward-looking (like a tax audit). The most important thing that a QEP must do is enhance student learning in some way. To help guide schools in development of their QEPs, SACS created a check-list of requirements for QEP selection. A QEP should:

- Improve student learning
- Show broad-based institutional participation
- Review current best practices in the topic
- Be supported financially by the institution
- State a clear timeline and responsibilities
- Demonstrate that the QEP topic is feasible and assessable

From Proposal to Selection to Design and Implementation: *Expanding Horizons*

During the fall 2006 semester, the Trinity University President constituted a QEP proposal committee to solicit ideas, proposals, and feedback on possible QEP topics from the entire campus community. By November, that committee narrowed the pool of solicitations to 10. The authors of these 10 proposals then provided a more fully-developed plan, justification, and estimated budget to the committee. Then, the committee narrowed the list to six finalists, five of which were from units other than the library (Expanding Horizons, 16). The topics were:

- Integrating Information Literacy across the Curriculum
- Difficult Dialogues
- Service Learning: Enhancing Education through Community Engagement (a student-driven proposal)
- Global Learning Enhancement through Coordinated Seminars
- Improving Science Appreciation at Trinity University
- Towards Global Citizenship

The six finalists presented their proposals to the campus community early in the spring 2007 semester. The proposal committee recommended the three most promising proposals to the president for a final decision. While the formal announcement to the campus did not occur until March 30, 2007, the University Librarian and I were notified of the selection of our IL proposal a month ear-

lier and we began to work on a list of possible committee members to write the plan to integrate information literacy at Trinity. From conversations with the president, it was clear that he liked that the information literacy proposal would have the widest impact across the curriculum. Another strength was its relative affordability, compared with the travel required by other proposed topics. Lastly, the strongest point, when compared to the others, was that we had existent data and could prove an information literacy gap in our students.

The implementation committee then took over and began drafting what would become an 86-page blueprint to integrate information literacy across the curriculum. Using the requirements (http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/QEP%20Handbook.pdf) from SACS as a guide, the committee began with goals, a plan, a budget, and a five-year implementation schedule. The committee consisted of the University Librarian, the information literacy coordinator, seven faculty members from across the disciplines, two staff members, one alumni representative, two students, and the Associate VP for Information Resources and Administrative Affairs (the campus liaison to SACS). The president's first order of business was to name the project "Expanding Horizons: Using Information in the 21st Century." However, the entire campus still calls it the QEP.

The work of the committee over the next twelve months started with an introductory education of committee members by what we actually meant by "information literacy." Then, as a group, we needed to draft our goals. Drafting goals off the bat was important because we were required by SACS to make sure they would be measurable over five years and, thus, assessable. One of our first orders of business was a day long brainstorming retreat and we were assisted greatly in this effort by Jill Gremmels, currently the Library Director at Davidson College. Throughout the process, outside facilitators like Jill helped immensely because they let your teaching faculty know that other institutions "do" information literacy, value it, and think it enhances their students' education. The committee worked on a year-by-year plan, a comprehensive budget, and a thorough justification using existing assessment for Trinity's choice in QEP topics. The committee posted a draft of the plan in October 2007 on the university website, took comments and went on a public relations blitz for the next two months. Everyone's comments and concerns were aired and the committee tried to address them all, when feasible, in the final draft of the plan. Then, the SACS onsite review team came to campus in February 2008.

Trinity University received rave reviews for our Quality Enhancement Plan from the onsite visit team. This team, chosen by SACS, goes back to those QEP criteria and ensures that each institution is putting forth a plan that will work and meets those goals. After approval, the QEP committee dissolved and the president appointed the campus information literacy committee, consisting of two co-directors (a librarian and a teaching faculty member), three additional faculty members, a staff member, two administrative representatives, two students, and the Faculty Technology Liaison (a position created by the QEP). This committee oversees the continued development of the QEP. Now towards the end of the second year of the program, Trinity can say that it continues to grow and has been a great success.

Building a Foundation

When other librarians and colleagues hear about the Quality Enhancement Plan at Trinity, the question I hear most often is, "How did you manage that?" I also often hear comments like, "Wow, we could never do something like that at XYZ college." But, what I would like to take the time to impress upon you here, is that you can build an information literacy program where you are, with or without a QEP. What the QEP did was allow us to move our information literacy efforts at a faster pace and supply funding for faculty incentives. But, prior to the QEP, we were already building an information literacy program piece by piece, and what follows is some advice so you can be ready for the opportunity if it lands at your library's doorstep.

First: engage faculty in conversations about information literacy and how instruction can help them. When I first arrived at Trinity in 2003, teaching faculty were a little reluctant to include librarians in their courses beyond the requisite first-year seminar, if that. By the time the QEP came along, four years later, we had grown the instruction program, in number of course-integrated sessions, by over 200%. How? We used a small grant from the Associated Colleges of the South to hold lunch/information sessions with faculty. We also pushed a very active library liaison model, in which all librarians were assigned a role, to engage faculty in conversations about their teaching and research, in conjunction with collection development and instruction. We hosted a new faculty orientation in the library, co-sponsored by other groups on campus, where we introduced faculty to their new students, via what they knew about library research, and we gave them ideas of ways in which working with their library liaison could help.

(QEP...Continued from page 9)

Second: help the teaching librarians grow. Not all librarians will be as comfortable with teaching as the main instruction librarians in your library, but everyone should be able to advocate for the need for information literacy. There is a difference. Make information literacy part of the common story in your library. Send librarians to ACRL Immersion, if you can. But, if you cannot, then take time to do in-house workshops where everyone can feel that they are a part of the information literacy effort.

Third: Remember the power of data. It was very clear to me that although other faculty, and even students, had great ideas for possible QEP topics, they could not prove the need at Trinity. In the library, on the other hand, we had been collecting data for five years (and so had other libraries, based on our lit review) that we could use to prove the value of information literacy. We collected simple things like the "one minute paper" or "two things I

learned today" and we also had more advanced data from the Research Practices Survey we took part in. The message here is to try and collect something and be ready to do something with it. Think about what you're evaluating from your library instruction and make it purposeful.

Where Trinity is Now…and Where Trinity is Going

Trinity has completed year two of the QEP, including the faculty workshops that take place every May. The greatest success this year was, in my opinion, that assessment is no longer a bad word with faculty and that most of our faculty participating in this year's QEP grant process, funds that are supported through the QEP budget, actually created some authentic assessment out of their assignments and have data to support the integration of information literacy in their courses. The potential for information literacy is growing beyond grant courses, as faculty who have good experiences with their students work are now integrating information literacy in courses

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(Final Answer...Continued from page 7)

Smartphone:

Finally, Poll Everywhere provides a simple, smartphone optimized web interface for users with web-enabled mobile devices. As with the text messaging, users submit the response code associated with their answer. The primary advantage of this method, over text messaging, for smartphone users is that they will not incur any SMS message fees.

Figure 5: Smartphone interface

Polling in Action

There are a variety of ways that polling questions can be used to support instruction during a session. One option is to use questions to assess students' knowledge of the topics to be taught. The responses can be used to adjust the time spent on particular concepts. In addition, questions can be used to gauge student learning and help to determine whether additional instruction is required before moving on to the next topic. Responses to free text questions can be used to stimulate classroom discussion as students may feel freer to express their opinions if the initial response is anonymous.

With its free account option, Poll Everywhere is a tool that will allow you to experiment with and assess the efficacy of a personal response system in your classroom with very little financial investment. When used effectively, these systems can stimulate student interaction and enhance learning, so go ahead and give it a try!

References

Bruff, D. (2010) *Classroom Response System ("Clickers") Bibliography*. Vanderbilt Center for Teaching. Retrieved from http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching_guides/technology/clickers/

prov skills, instructors can be more bold and not fear the unanticipated mishaps that have happened to all of us at one point or another during instruction or a presentation.

For more information about the conference, and the PowerPoints and handouts for many of the sessions, including from all the sessions listed in this article, visit the website at
http://www.loexconference.org/2010/program/sessions.html

(QEP….Continued from page 10)

without applying for grants. This is a good sign that Trinity's efforts will sustain beyond the five-year timeline of the QEP.

As I look to the future, and the end of Trinity's formal QEP structured information literacy program in three years, I would like to see a few things continue with support from the university. First would be the faculty workshops. These have served as a sort of Center for Teaching and Learning workshop, in a way. Trinity does not have a standalone center and our information literacy workshops have been a great place for faculty to gather and talk about their teaching. I would also like the campus Information Literacy Committee to continue beyond the QEP in order to provide guidance to faculty and continue to plan events. This will, of course, require approval and a budget but with the proper foundation and effectiveness data, I think Trinity can do that.

Selected Bibliography

1) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. 2008. Handbook for reaffirmation of accreditation. http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/QEP%20Handbook.pdf

2) Trinity University. 2008. Expanding Horizons: Using information in the 21st century. http://www.trinity.edu/departments/academic_affairs/qep/ExpandingHorizonsQEPpublic.pdf

For More Information: Other Institutions with Information Literacy QEPs

1) Amberton University, Garland, TX
    http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2007%20track%20b%20qeps/Amberton%20University.pdf

2) Eastern Shore Community College, Melfa, VA
    http://www.es.vccs.edu/mimik/mimik_live_data/view.php?id=169&record_id=386&menu_id=12

3) Georgia Highlands College, Rome, GA
    http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2008%20track%20a%20qeps/Georgia%20Highlands%20College%20QEP.pdf

4) Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN
    http://www.lmunet.edu/curstudents/sacs/QEP/QEP.pdf

5) North Carolina Wesleyan College, Rocky Mount, NC
    http://library.ncwc.edu/qep.htm

6) North Georgia College & State University, Dahlongea, GA
    http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2007%20track%20b%20qeps/North%20Georgia%20College%20State%20University.pdf

7) River Parishes Community College, Sorrento, LA,
    http://www.rpcc.edu/qep.cfm

8) Southwestern Adventist University, Keene, TX
    http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2007%20track%20b%20qeps/Southwestern%20Adventist%20University.doc.pdf

9) University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL
    http://if.ucf.edu/