



QEP Newsletter

Spring 2008

Creating a Culture that Focuses on Enhancing Student Learning

Introducing the new Director

My son said, "come on down to Texas – you'll love it here." He was right.

I moved to Killeen in November 2006, and was hired part-time in March '07 by CTC Continuing Education to fill in for a staffer on leave for 6 months. I started as **Director of Learning Outcomes**

Assessment on August 20, and spent much of the fall learning to know the many facets of CTC, how things work here, and the accomplishments and challenges of the QEP. I also prepared the QEP Report Card for 2006-2007, and a proposed plan for the coming year.

My background brings many experiences helpful to this position. In the Youth Opportunity Program, we worked with 14- to 22- year-olds to strengthen their personal, social, and academic development; at SJBTC I supervised faculty and ran the outreach program for a rural vocational-technical college; and at Fort Lewis College I did the full magilla of program development, faculty recruitment and supervision, scheduling, marketing, enrollment, reporting, and budget development and management, for a cash-funded outreach program.

At UWEX, I worked for the dean of statewide extension college programs, comprising 13 universities and 13 2-year centers. Our office managed the annual planning and budgeting, budget requests to the legislature, and strategic planning. Prior work included writing and editing publications for audiences from young students and general public, to the technical and scholarly.

Throughout all of this runs a thread of applied research, where using data for decision-making makes it meaningful for accountability. I believe that understanding data fuels creative problem solving. This brings us back to my learning curve during last fall.

I can see that in your first two years of QEP implementation there was very broad participation in committee work, and an impressive



Jane Zimmerman

menu of options and activities. Feedback I got from the many active participants included how daunting the volume of work was, especially for the instructional units and particularly the amount of documentation called for.

In concert with the Institutional Effectiveness office, I plan to streamline those processes. However, it will remain important for departments to report quality enhancement initiatives and outcomes so that we can both use the

information for ongoing adaptations, and provide the

comprehensive information called for during reaffirmation milestones. It is much easier to gather this as we go along than to try to find it after 5 or 10 years, just in time to turn in the assignment.

2008 QEP Initiatives

In spring 2007, Dr. Pate and the QEP specialists surveyed faculty, students and staff in a variety of formats. Two common themes emerged from that exploration: students' preparedness to do college work and their writing skills interfere with many students' ability to succeed in college courses.

Thus, the 2007-2009 initiatives aim to improve students' study

skills and develop writing skills appropriate to their aspirations. Desired outcomes are to increase student success in courses, increase enrollments into the next course in a sequence, and show growth in the proportion of students persisting toward completion of certificates and degrees.

Minute Papers – One strategy for doing this is to use the Minute Paper in selected courses. In college, as in other areas of life, skills are honed by practice. During Phase I of the QEP, one CTC department experimented with the "minute paper" as its classroom intervention, and found that it was a great tool for not only practicing writing, but also for reinforcing learning in the course content. This approach is proposed to engage writing

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across the curriculum, exercise interpretation and summary as study skills, and provide an ongoing feedback loop between the instructor and the student.

There is ample literature on the minute paper strategy. I will post some links on the QEP web page, but here's a brief example: <http://www-writing.berkeley.edu:16080/wab/2-2-gone.htm>

We have chosen the first implementation for the minute paper to be in History 1301 because the course touches the greatest number of our students throughout the system, the content lends itself to narrative writing, and the master syllabus states a learning outcome for students to "communicate thoughts in writing." This semester, three instructors of History 1301 are piloting the project in central campus classes.

Expected outcomes of this intervention are that, with practice, students will write better, that by summarizing promptly for each class session they will retain more and more effectively organize what they've learned, and that the instructor will receive valuable timely feedback to guide subsequent lessons.

The instructors in this pilot will provide feedback on the process and the method. This will be used to develop materials needed to implement the project in additional central campus sections and other campuses in fall of 2008, and in distance learning sections in spring of 2009.

First-year course – Responding to the call from many faculty for a course that specifically teaches college study attributes, Dawn Green, president of the faculty senate, is leading a group to develop such a course. The group had an initial meeting on January 11, and is gathering resources for the next meeting.

Coincidentally, Green found that Constance Staley, author of *Focus on College Success*, may be at the TCCTA conference in February. The contents page of the book closely reflects the brainstorming list that came out of the initial committee meeting. (<http://cengagesites.com/academic/?site=2596§ion=10>) This project will be discussed at the next faculty senate meeting.

Service Excellence Conference – The Student Support Services units, led by HR, have developed a successful conference program over the past two years. This conference fosters service excellence in providing accessible, timely and complete services and administrative processes for our students and staff. The next conference is scheduled for February 20 and March 7, 2008. New this year is the opportunity for Continental Campus sites to participate through the live online classroom. Watch the *NewsLink* for details. If you do not receive the *NewsLink* weekly e-mail, request it from Vasbinder.bruce@ctcd.edu.

Committee reorganization – In keeping with our goal to embrace quality enhancements as part of our culture, I have recommended mainstreaming QEP processes into college operations at the dean and unit level. In academic departments, this will facilitate discipline-oriented quality enhancements. On the administrative and student services side, it maintains the chain of command with deans and unit directors throughout CTC's various campuses.

I appreciate the use of unit QEP Specialists to gain broad input and provide grass roots training for QEP planning and initiatives in Phase I. This base will serve us well as we go forward. As we proceed in Phase II I think it's important to mainstream QEP planning and decision making. Deans, chairs and directors can then delegate operational responsibilities as they see fit, and the trained QEP Specialists will remain a valuable part of the process within their units. This integrates QEP responsibilities into CTC's normal culture.

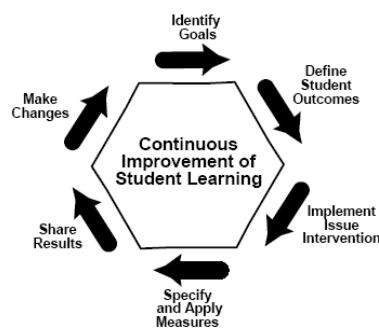
Keeping our eyes on the ball

With the new Phase II initiatives at the top of the stack, I've been asked if that means all the rest of it will go away. It cannot. In creating a culture that focuses on enhancing student learning, the lessons of Phase I must affect our practice in educating our students.

In instructional units, this means that the effective strategies used to provide early, prescriptive *feedback to students* regarding their learning as they progress through a course, enabling them to benefit from intervention and assistance services, must become part of habitual classroom practice. And it means that we must also continue the strategies that make learning outcomes measurable.

CTC's [QEP](#), sections 6 and 7, outline our ongoing responsibilities. We will need to continue specifying student learning outcomes at the course and program level. Departments / disciplines will continue to develop action plans for increasing student success in achieving those outcomes. And we will continue to need ways to quantify the results.

I expect that much of this has been relaxed by this time, this year, with the transition in QEP leadership. Relaxed is not forgotten – we will be looking for year-end reports outlined on page 39 of the



QEP. I will call on Dean Mikles and the department chairs over the next few weeks to collaborate on sensible and practical strategies for getting this done in the instructional units, and lay the groundwork for the ongoing cycle.

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Student Services units should also be alert for improvements in Service Excellence to measure and report for 2007-2008.

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