

## **QEP Topics**

### **Explanation & Justification**

#### **Potential QEP Topics\***

#### **Long List – Revised 7/9/08**

- Enhance critical thinking skills across the curriculum
- Enhance writing skills across the curriculum
- Enhance reading skills across the curriculum
- Improve cultural competency skills
- Increase student engagement
- Enhance active and collaborative learning across the curriculum
- Learning to think globally in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Improve oral communication across the curriculum
- Increase employability through enhancement of life skills
- Increase information literacy
- Improve mathematical literacy

\*These topics were those that the QEP Topic Selection Committee developed as viable potential QEP topics based on exhaustive data review supporting the value of each topic for our particular campus community.

#### **Enhance critical thinking skills across the curriculum**

Explanation: There are data that indicate COM could improve on teaching critical thinking to our students. In 2007, the QEP committee administered a survey that asked the campus community to rank the importance and effectiveness of our nine core competencies. Critical thinking ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in importance but was only ranked 4<sup>th</sup> (tied with math skills) in effectiveness. This could indicate we are not effectively teaching critical thinking as well as we should based upon its importance. In the 2005 Graduate Follow up survey, 19% of the graduates indicated that their education at COM did not help them “gain the ability to use quantitative and qualitative skills to evaluate ideas and empirical claims, and to develop alternative perspective and conclusions.” Also, in the 2008 Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency test, only 55% of 56 students scored at or above the national mean for critical thinking.

Justification: Critical thinking is a skill that will help students succeed regardless of their choice of study. Partially due to No Child Left Behind and the related high stakes exams, high school graduates don’t have exposure to critical thinking assignments as previous generations. We could develop a QEP that attempts to include critical thinking components in all of our courses.

### **Enhance writing skills across the curriculum**

Explanation: A writing skills QEP topic would focus on helping students develop the ability to produce clear, correct and coherent prose, adapted to purpose, occasion, and audience. By embedding this approach in all classes across the academic curriculum this would give students the experiences they need to hone their writing skills.

Justification: Data drawn from the CAAP testing results, AtD cohort data, Title III data, the QEP survey and the graduate survey all indicate COM students would benefit from a QEP topic that focuses on enhancing writing skills.

### **Enhance Reading Skills across the Curriculum**

Explanation: This QEP topic would enhance reading skills across the curriculum by improving implementing new teaching strategies and practices that would improve student reading skills, specifically for knowledge, information and comprehension.

Justification: Data strongly suggests that this would be a viable QEP topic. In the CAAP reading exam COM students scored .9 below the national mean. Only 38% of COM students scored at or above the national mean for community students. Data from the General Education map indicates that while reading is heavily assessed, it is not frequently taught. The QEP survey indicated that of the importance of the nine competencies surveyed, reading comprehension had the highest mean ranking. Achieving the Dream and Title III data also support selection of enhancing reading skills as a QEP topic.

### **Improving Cultural Competency Skills**

Alternate Topic Title: Cultural Competency: Understanding and Respecting Differences

Explanation: In today's increasingly global society, it is essential to academic, professional, and personal success that students develop cultural competence. Cultural competence has been defined by Diversity Training University International as having four cognitive components: 1) awareness (consciousness of one's personal reactions to people who are different), 2) attitude (one's beliefs and values about cultural differences), 3) knowledge (information about different cultural practices and worldviews), and 4) skills (ability to interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds). The development of cultural competence will enable students to achieve success in a culturally diverse and global job market.

Justification: Although not ranked as highly important on the QEP survey, data from the CCSSE indicate that students feel that their COM college experience does not contribute substantially to their understanding of other cultures. In addition, Gen Ed map data indicate that we teach but do not assess this competency across the curriculum. Given that multicultural issues are identified as an important COM value, perhaps we should address these issues in a more focused manner.

### **Increase student engagement**

Explanation: There is a positive link between student engagement and learning outcomes such as improved critical thinking skills and higher overall academic performance. As the student becomes more academically and socially integrated they become more committed to the goal of graduation. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) was created to help community colleges measure how often their students are engaging in effective educational practices that tend to support educational success. The basic theory is that the more engaged the students become, the more likely they are to persist and succeed in college. But it is challenging to get community college students engaged since so many of our students are part time, non-traditional, first generation college students.

Justification: Fortunately, there are many sources of data available for COM to analyze student engagement on our campus. The CCSSE survey was administered in spring 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2008. From the survey results, CCSSE calculates five benchmarks of student engagement including *active and collaborative learning*, *student effort*, *academic challenge*, *student-faculty interaction*, and *support for learners*. From the 2006 results, COM scored below the national mean for three benchmarks: *academic challenge*, *student-faculty interactions*, and *support for learners*. (Note: 2008 results have not yet been published)

In the Spring 2008 semester COM also participated in the Survey Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) survey. This survey was administered much earlier in the semester than the CCSSE survey so that we can get input from students that typically drop out the first few weeks of class. Enrollment data indicate that many students who apply to COM never enroll, and of those who do enroll, many drop out within the first three weeks. Data from SENSE indicate a number of ways that students could become more engaged from the beginning.

Using the 2008 SENSE and CCSSE data, we could create a QEP that focuses on increasing student engagement to help our students be more successful.

### **Enhance active and collaborative learning across the curriculum**

Explanation: Considerable research demonstrates that students learn best when they are actively involved in the process and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Regardless of the subject matter, students learning in an active and collaborative setting tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. Students who work in collaborative groups also appear more satisfied with their classes.

Justification: Data from the CCSSE survey (administered in spring 2003, 2004, 2006) demonstrates a need to enhance active and collaborative learning. On the CCSSE benchmark, active and collaborative learning, COM scored below the National mean in 2003 and 2006. Indeed in 2006 COM scored .20 below the national mean overall with particular areas such as making presentations and working together with students outside class as identified areas of weakness.

### **Learning to think globally in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Explanation: This QEP topic would help prepare students for life in a globally interconnected world by helping students acquire the skills necessary to be successful in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century global economy.

Justification: General Education map data supports a QEP topic focusing on preparing students for life in globally connected 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The map data indicates faculty put importance on students achieving this competency, but thus far faculty have yet to implement strategies to assess this competency, which is necessary for students to succeed in the global environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Student opinions expressed in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) also support this conclusion. With regard to the effectiveness in which COM prepares student in regard to nine competencies, the QEP survey indicated global awareness was ranked ninth out of the nine competencies. Obviously, this leaves room for improvement.

### **Improving Oral Communication across the Curriculum**

Alternate topic title: Oral Communication across the Curriculum: How to Speak so that People Will Listen and Understand

Explanation: The ability to effectively communicate ideas in oral form is essential to academic and professional success. This topic focuses on enhancing the speaking skills of all COM students so that oral presentations are organized, free of grammatical errors, adapted to the audience, and delivered with appropriate eye contact, volume, rate of speech, posture, and gestures. Furthermore, since effective communication is relevant to all disciplines, students will be more broadly required to practice oral communication across the curriculum.

Justification: The Gen Ed Map data indicate that oral communication is minimally addressed across the curriculum. Relative to the other competencies identified, only reading is taught in fewer courses, but it is assessed in many more courses than is oral communication. Furthermore, the QEP survey data indicate that oral communication was consistently ranked among the top four most important competencies by the different respondent groups, yet it is minimally addressed (relative to the other high-ranked competencies).

### **Increase Employability through enhancement of Life Skills**

Alternate topic title: Life Skills: Managing Time and Resources to Achieve Success

Explanation: Life skills include a number of important skills rarely taught in an academic curriculum, yet essential to academic, personal, and professional success. They include time management, financial planning, how to access resources to obtain needed information or skills, conflict management, and awareness of personal responsibility for one's life choices. Employers value these skills, and students who possess these skills will be more successful in all areas of their lives. While these skills are sometimes incorporated into courses designed for students with developmental deficits, all students will benefit from the achievement of these life skills.

Justification: On the open-ended portion of the QEP survey, respondents identified life skills, time management, and career services as important additional priorities to be addressed through the college experience. Furthermore, enrollment statistics indicate that the majority of our students do not arrive on COM's campus as college-ready. This is why the College 411 course addresses these kinds of life skills, yet this course does not currently target the majority of our students. Furthermore, these skills can and should be addressed in additional ways (orientation, student services, etc.).

### **Increase information literacy**

Explanation: Information literacy can be defined as the ability to locate, manage, critically evaluate, and use information for problem solving, research, decision making, and continued professional development"

Justification: The amount of information that our students are exposed to is growing at exponential rates. While most of the information available to our students is not relevant to their careers and daily lives, they are reliant on more and more information to become successful in life. The task of gleaning the relevant information from the mountains of available information is a learned skill that many of our students do not possess. If a student does not possess information literacy skills, they can easily become overwhelmed with the never ending task of trying to keep their knowledge current in a rapidly changing world. Without these skills, students will find their knowledge and education quickly outdated and they will face the real threat of being marginalized in an information and technology driven world.

### **Improving mathematical literacy**

Explanation: This potential QEP topic would enhance math skills across the curriculum by implementing new teaching strategies and practices. More emphasis would be placed on math skills than in our current curriculum.

Justification: Data suggests that this would be a viable QEP topic. In the CAAP testing exam COM students scored .2% below the national mean. Achieving the Dream data shows that the average successful completion rate of all COM students enrolled in developmental math is 44%. Other data from the General Education map indicates that math is not heavily emphasized by most general education courses (in terms of teaching or assessment). The QEP survey indicated that math comprehension was ranked as 4/5 (tied with critical thinking) out of the nine competencies surveyed.