

Comprehensive Standard

3.3.2 The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. **(Quality Enhancement Plan)**

Recommendations, Analysis, and Comments of the On-Site Committee (pp. 1-7)

University Response to the Report of the On-Site Committee (pp. 8-19)

A. Brief description of the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan

Learning for Life: Experience Your Future focuses on applied learning strategies and high impact practices to enrich student educational experiences. The principles of experiential education will be embedded into capstone courses for all students. These courses will be re-designed to better prepare NSU graduates for life after college. A faculty development model will be established that aligns with the University mission and fulfills two specific Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Rubrics have been presented to demonstrate various benchmarks and levels of skills mastery.

B. Analysis of the Acceptability of the Quality Enhancement Plan

1. **An Institutional Process.** *The institution uses an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment.*

The process utilized by the institution was open, transparent, and was purposeful in gaining information and insights from a wide array of internal and external constituents and stakeholders. This is evident from the committee makeup, the meeting reports, the numerous forums and the outreach to the regional community. Two years of planning for this QEP began in fall 2014 and evolved into a steering committee that presented several iterations of the plan that concluded with a decentralized model designed with both a qualitative and quantitative data construct to demonstrate the two SLOs. The institutional process was carefully designed and relied on: extensive scholarly research, professional development activity, international conference participation, analysis of nationally-recognized student survey data, university faculty information sessions and academic governance committee presentations, and in-house faculty/staff surveys. Additionally, a committee of faculty and administrators was established to construct the QEP draft into a plan that would be focused on enhancing the student experiential learning experience.

2. **Focus of the Plan.** *The institution identifies a significant issue that (1) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and (2) accomplishes the mission of the institution.*

The topic of the plan, titled “*Learning for Life: Experience Your Future,*” institutionalizes high impact experiences intended to better prepare graduates to apply their formal education to life after college (e.g. career, graduate school). The plan aligns with the University mission to “[prepare] its students to become productive members of society”; reflects the university goal “to create an environment that supports individual efforts toward academic, career, social and civic success”; and is embedded in the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan.

The institution has defined two student learning outcomes (SLOs), which are aligned to demonstrate the ability of students to critically reflect, apply knowledge and link theory with practice. Furthermore, these learning outcomes employ the Principles of Best Practice of the National Society for Experiential Education.

SLO #1: During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines; and

SLO #2: During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection.

Each of the SLOs have carefully-crafted rubrics with benchmarks and detail four (4) levels of mastery of skills that are tied to the aforementioned Principles of the Society.

By aligning the two SLOs to the University mission, the plan is designed to address and reflect the University’s mission through experiential learning capstone experiences. Additionally, the plan reinforces the historical roots of the institution and the commitment to its foundation of teaching and learning in teacher education and preparation.

3. **Institutional Capability for the Initiation, Implementation, and Completion of the Plan.** *The institution provides evidence that it has sufficient resources to initiate, implement, sustain, and complete the QEP.*

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee evaluated institutional capability as measured in three parts. The first is the overall support of all constituents and stakeholders of the institution. In this respect, based on the broad based approach to its selection, commitment to and support of the plan is prevalent. The faculty and staff are very supportive of the goals, objectives, and importance of the *Learning for Life* program. Furthermore, students are equally excited and energized by the program and its objectives. In addition, the immediate community is also extremely supportive of the selected QEP and are eager to see its implementation. From this, the institution does have the capability to initiate the QEP.

The second aspect of capability is the human capacity and overall opportunities to implement and sustain the QEP. This includes the necessary faculty and staff time to monitor internships, research programs, and performance based events/projects as well as the opportunities within the extended community to support the external demand by students that will be needed. Regarding the former, the understanding of time that will be required by faculty and staff to implement the QEP is uneven. Additionally, students believe, regardless of program of study, that all three experiential learning activities will be made available to them. Also, it was noted in one of the focus groups that some programs (e.g., education and nursing) already have built in experiential learning activities. It is unclear how these programs view their implementation of the QEP as an enhancement and improvement on their efforts. Regarding the latter (external opportunities), the business community is eager and willing to accept more internships; however, they expressed concern on how many they will be able to accept as well as, pay for, the increase in numbers that is being expected of them--especially with the increased growth in enrollment.

The third aspect of capability is in regards to budgetary considerations that will lead to full completion of the QEP. The budget discussion noted that a "robust budget" was first presented and then based on discussions at the leadership team level, the budget was considered too high and it was pared back to the approximately \$204,000 annual budget. The total cost of personnel (human resources and staff positions along with faculty grant stipends of \$15,534 annually) a flat, recurring budget of \$171,310 for each of the five years. A combination of seven part-time individuals are assigned to the plan. No full-time personnel have been allocated to this plan. Additionally, \$1,083,700 will be allocated over the five years of the QEP for faculty development, supplies, recognition, marketing, etc. In sum, the University has committed \$1,974,400 in total funding for the five years.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee has concerns that this amount is too low to effectively complete the QEP. This was discussed in the open forum, for example, regarding costs of internships and the notion of private gift support will be used. While this may be feasible, no contingency plan exists if these gifts do not materialize. More importantly, the faculty development allocation raises concerns for the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. It is the consensus of the Committee that this will be a critical component and will require intensive work and significant resources. The Committee realizes that budgets remain stretched and, thus encourages the institution to look at how to reallocate resources within its QEP budget or to denote which existing resources will be dedicated to the QEP.

Finally, to ensure success, given the number of online students, the Committee strongly encourages the institution to define specific strategies and tactics to address online students to ensure that complete implementation of the QEP is realized.

Committee Recommendation 8: The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP.

4. Broad-based Involvement of Institutional Constituencies. *The institution demonstrates the involvement of its constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the Plan.*

The institution has demonstrated a comprehensive and broad based process that involved faculty, staff, and students in focus groups, surveys, committees, etc. in the development of the QEP.

The process formally started in December 2014 with the formulation of a steering committee to review pertinent institutional data to identify potential topics. The team included faculty members representing each of the four colleges, the president of the Student Government Association, an undergraduate student and a graduate student from an online program, and the Executive Director for Academic Advising Services. The team first met on December 3, 2014, and developed a process to collect and analyze data; established a time line, development of a survey process.

The survey was sent to 8,890 potential respondents and had a 7% response rate; of the participants, 51% were students, 27% were faculty, and 22% were staff. The results were discussed and analyzed at the team meeting on January 21, 2015.

Based on this research, in March 2015 the committee began to share findings and topics with institution. Multiple sessions were held at the campus in Natchitoches along with meetings/sessions in Alexandria, Leesville, and Shreveport with faculty and staff groups. At these meetings, the findings of the survey were revealed and other suggested topics were received and considered.

Following these meetings, an additional survey was administered and various topics were ranked from highest to lowest. The top three responses included communication, critical thinking, and experiential learning and the resulting proposal submitted focused on experiential learning. The team submitting the proposal included faculty and staff representing Academic Affairs, the Student Experience, and Alumni Affairs.

In October 2015, the plan was shared with the President's Leadership Team, which consists of the University's five vice presidents, the four college deans, the Chief Technology Officer, the Internal Auditor, the Dean of Students, the Athletics Director, the Faculty Senate president, the Executive Director of Institutional Advancement, and the University Planning and Assessment Director. Feedback and concerns around cost, number of personnel required, and the ability to measure learning outcomes were shared with the team. The team was able to address these concerns, and the President's Leadership Team endorsed the plan in December 2015 and began to implement the plan by developing timelines, goals, and objectives.

The development of the QEP was then briefly delayed until the summer and fall semesters due to reorganization of Academic Affairs and the President's decision to "decentralize" the QEP and name a faculty member with experience in developing and supervising internships as the QEP Director. A professor, who also serves as the Department Head of Health and Human Performance, was named as the director. Also, a QEP Executive Committee was formed with the following members: the Chief Academic Officer, the QEP Director, the Executive Director of the First-Year Experience, the Faculty Senate President, the Assistant Vice President for External Affairs for University Advancement, the Student Government Association President, and the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources.

The QEP Executive Committee scheduled forums to educate constituents about the QEP and experiential learning: two at the Natchitoches campus and one at the Shreveport campus. The first forum was recorded and posted on the University's electronic course platform, and the third was broadcast to the Alexandria and Fort Polk sites via compressed video. Presentations were made to the Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce and to the Northwestern Foundation Board and the Alumni Association Annual Meeting. The President also addressed the Faculty Senate and gave a presentation on the QEP to the Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance.

A task force (consisting of Executive Committee members, seven faculty, the Director of Counseling and Career Services, and the President and CEO of the Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the team that wrote the proposal) was created to work on writing the plan. At its November 2016 meeting, the task force selected the QEP title—*Learning for Life: Experience Your Future*—and approved the logo designed by the Director of Marketing.

On January 9, 2017, University faculty and staff were gathered for updates and presentations on the QEP. In February 2017, posters were placed in classrooms and high visibility areas and a QEP Launch Party was hosted on campus.

In sum, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that the institution demonstrates the adequate involvement of its constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the Plan.

5. Assessment of the Plan. *The institution identifies goals and a plan to assess the achievement of those goals.*

The Quality Enhancement Plan, *Learning for Life: Experience Your Future*, clearly identifies two student learning outcomes that relate to three high-impact educational practices, which include internships, undergraduate research, and performance-based events or projects. The SLOs support the institution's mission to prepare students to "become productive members of

society and promote economic development” as well as supporting a core value of the institution and tenet of the institution’s vision statement. These SLOs include:

1. During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines; and
2. During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection.

Although the institution has defined goals/outcomes, the plan to assess achievement of these goals was not well developed. The institution has developed two rubrics to assess student achievement; however, it is unclear how the rubric for SLO #1 will be employed and by whom. In addition, it could not be determined if a common assessment tool would be utilized by internship site supervisors or if professional development and orientation would be provided to site supervisors.

For SLO #2, five common questions have been developed and will be graded with the identified rubric. Individual programs will determine the manner in which those questions will be provided to the students, which gives programs flexibility in delivery methods. However, it could not be determined at the time of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee visit who will be responsible for collecting and scoring the questions using the rubric.

Some members of the faculty focus group indicated that assessment of the SLOs is one of the areas of biggest concern.

Committee Recommendation 9: The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it has a plan to assess the achievement of the goals and outcomes articulated in its QEP.

Analysis and Comments for Strengthening the QEP

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee offers the following ideas for strengthening the QEP:

- 1) The plan to assess achievement of the student learning outcomes requires a more detailed and precise evaluation framework including articulation of assessment responsibilities both at the departmental and institutional level and identification of at least one common institutional assessment measure.
- 2) A clearer, more precise, and uniform process of data collection for assessment of the QEP learning outcomes might be investigated.

- 3) The institution indicated in interviews, as well as in the written plan, that the QEP Director would be a person who is, at the same time, an existing department head, departmental internship coordinator, and faculty member. As the implementation and start-up is a very large administrative task, it remains to be seen if such staffing will be adequate to address the program needs of this plan. The university might evaluate the decision made in the second iteration of the QEP to have the QEP Director as a less-than-full-time administrator.
- 4) More clarification is needed on a decentralized staffing plan as some participants in the faculty focus group indicated that each department would have a release-time faculty member for program coordination and assessment. One might expect that this would be included in the Budget portion of the plan (p. 36).
- 5) The QEP Committee would likely benefit from reviewing accessibility to experiential learning knowledge for its implementation and ongoing faculty development.
- 6) A strategic plan for faculty development plan can be a sustainable way for implementing the QEP across the curriculum.
- 7) Integrating the Principles of Experiential Education throughout the curriculum, beginning with the first-year seminar, could be a consideration to strengthen the QEP by preparing students early on for the experiences in the third and fourth year.
- 8) The faculty indicated in interviews with the Committee that they were desirous of curriculum guidance and expertise in experiential education. A well-designed and comprehensive faculty development plan for experiential learning could address this need.
- 9) The five-year timeline for the QEP course implementation could be revisited for a more streamlined and ambitious rollout of six experiential learning credits for all programs.
- 10) Evidence of sustainability of the QEP beyond five years could be designed.
- 11) Expansion of types of experiential education might be revisited to present faculty and students with additional options for learning opportunities.
- 12) Consideration might be given to address the possibility that heavy reliance on internships may result in a glut of students wanting such opportunities in a limited marketplace: Alexandria, Leesville, Natchitoches, and Shreveport.

University Response:

Note: All supporting documents referenced in this response are located at <https://www.nsula.edu/institutionaleffectiveness/>. In most cases, a link to each supporting document is located directly below the link to the narrative University response. Please download the response so that you can easily navigate between it and its supporting documents. The supporting documents are in numerical order in accordance with the sequence in which they appear in the response. If the documents referenced are located at another location on the institutional effectiveness website, they are listed by category name (i.e., STRATEGIC PLANNING); sub-category name (i.e., Strategic Communications); and the cited name of the reference (i.e., "1 - Dr. Henderson - Week of 2 February 2015").

Northwestern State University has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), *Learning for Life: Experience Your Future*, that focuses on experiential learning ([1: Learning for Life: Experience Your Future](#)). The University provides evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP and that it has a plan to assess the achievement of the goals and outcomes articulated in the QEP.

Following the SACSCOC On-Site Visit in March 2017, the University made numerous revisions to its QEP based on feedback from students, faculty, staff, University stakeholders, and the SACSCOC On-Site Visiting Team. As the responses to Recommendations 8 and 9 below demonstrate, these revisions ensure the University has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete its QEP and has a plan to assess the achievement of its goals and outcomes.

Institutional Capability for the Initiation, Implementation, and Completion of the Plan (Recommendation 8)

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee found that the University had the capability to initiate the QEP but recommended that it provide evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP. The Committee expressed concern about an uneven expectation of necessary faculty and staff time to monitor internships, research programs, and performance-based events/projects. To promote a deeper understanding of the QEP and its time commitments, the University integrated a presentation on the QEP into its Faculty Institute programming and conducted an Experiential Learning Conference for faculty during fall 2017 On-Call Week ([18: Experiential Learning Conference Program 15 August 2017](#)). The president-elect of the Board of the National Society for Experiential Education served as the keynote speaker for both events. The conference included four sessions: Principles of Good Practice for Experiential Education; Rubrics for the QEP; Reflection; and Assessment. Representatives from all academic programs and members of all QEP teams participated in the conference, along with members of the University's Leadership Team.

The Committee also noted that students believed, regardless of program of study, that all experiential learning activities would be made available to them. The University has addressed this by developing guidelines for curricular changes. The updated implementation process permits program faculty to adopt experiential learning activities specific to each program concentration, when appropriate and under certain stipulations ([1: Learning for Life: Experience Your Future, Section VI: Actions to be Implemented](#)). To ensure that students understand the curricular changes associated with the QEP, the QEP Director will guide program coordinators and academic advisors regarding available experiential learning activities.

An additional concern was that some programs already have built-in experiential learning activities and may not view QEP implementation as an enhancement. The 2017 Annual Report demonstrated that the QEP Pilot Programs needed additional focus on the practice of reflection. The Music program, for example, is incorporating a post-recital reflection exercise based on their experience in the QEP Pilot ([12: QEP Annual Report 2017](#)). The University is providing the seven QEP Pilot Programs with access to the same stipends and support funding that other programs will be using to implement the QEP. This support facilitates curricular improvements and professional development. Pilot Programs will have access to such support for an additional year, as well.

The Committee stated that the business community is eager to support student internships but is concerned about the availability of positions and funding. Students currently completing internships for the University's academic programs—Health and Exercise Science, Hospitality Management and Tourism, and Music, for example—are already doing so throughout the country. The incorporation of a Study Abroad option and changes to the implementation process will facilitate more flexibility for programs redesigning their curricula. By allowing program faculty to tailor experiential learning activities to individual program concentrations, under certain circumstances, the QEP will help programs ensure students have access to appropriate and accessible experiential learning activities.

To ensure completion of the QEP, the Committee suggested that additional personnel and resources may be necessary. In the original submission of the QEP, the budget, when printed, was split across two pages, thus appearing as two separate budgets—one for personnel and one for support. The grand total for the original budget was \$1,083,700, not \$1,974,400. However, enhancements to the QEP and its organizational structure resulted in increased budget allocations from \$1,083,700 to \$1,209,280. It should be noted, the University will not rely on private gifts to support the implementation and completion of the QEP.

Further, the Committee expressed concern that the original submission of the QEP did not include any full-time personnel. Following the visit of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee, the University established two full-time positions associated with the QEP. The University determined that a full-time director was advantageous for the accomplishment of the goals and outcomes articulated in its QEP. The role and responsibilities for the QEP Director are defined in two sections of the QEP ([1: Learning for Life: Experience Your Future, Section VIII:](#)

[Organizational Structure and Section IX: Resources](#)). The QEP Director is responsible for administering and coordinating the QEP and its budget; communicating with students, faculty, staff, and University stakeholders; marketing and web development; collaborating with the University Assessment Coordinator (UAC); coordinating professional development activities; serving on the University Assessment Committee; attending Curriculum Review Council meetings; developing student recognition programming; and compiling the QEP Impact Report. The University also established a new position, University Assessment Coordinator, to coordinate the University's QEP assessment activities. The UAC will report to the QEP Director. In addition, the University has created a position for Assistant Director of the QEP with faculty status. To assist in the governance of the QEP, the University has also formed three QEP Teams: Faculty Grants, Implementation, and Assessment. The 21 individuals who serve on these teams receive stipends (faculty and staff) or scholarships (students).

The Committee also recommended that the University ensure that the QEP addresses online students. Because the changes associated with the QEP are curricular changes, all students, regardless of course delivery location or method, will be required to complete the curriculum associated with their degree programs. To ensure that online students are familiar with the QEP and its requirements, the University has included an introduction to the QEP on its "Resources for Current eNSU Students" webpage (<https://www.nsula.edu/ensu/current-students/>). Online students will also receive information about curricular requirements from their assigned advisors.

University Actions Taken to Implement, Sustain, and Complete the QEP

- Began marketing the *Learning for Life* initiatives to the University community in spring 2017 and hosted QEP Launch Party on February 22, 2017 ([2: Current Sauce QEP Article](#))
- Held numerous conversations concerning the QEP with the SACSCOC On-Site Review Team during the On-Site Visit in early March 2017 ([3: Agenda SACSCOC On-Site Review](#))
- Assigned a full-time QEP Director in March and an Assistant Director with Faculty status; hired University Assessment Coordinator (UAC) (a new position) in July
- Developed and populated the Grants Team, Implementation Team, and Assessment Team ([4: QEP Teams 2017-18](#))
- Appointed coordinators in each academic program to facilitate QEP implementation ([5: QEP Implementation Timeline with Coordinators 2016-17](#))
- Revised the QEP timeline and department implementation timeline to expedite the implementation calendar ([5: QEP Implementation Timeline with Coordinators 2016-17](#))
- Developed and revised QEP faculty grant application form and process; see provided sample ([6: QEP Grant Application Example CON BSN 2017](#))
- Revised the QEP to incorporate an additional capstone experience focused on Study Abroad ([1: Learning for Life: Experience Your Future, Section V: Literature Review & Best Practices](#))

- Developed rubric to guide the Implementation Team in the process of reviewing curricular change proposals (7: [QEP Implementation Rubric](#))
- Held meetings with all pilot program coordinators, QEP Teams, and program coordinators preparing to submit proposals in November 2017 (8: [Minutes of May 2 QEP Meeting](#); 9: [Minutes of May 9 QEP Meeting](#))
- Revised the QEP budget to ensure adequate resources are available for personnel, professional development, extra services contracts, travel, supplies, operating expenses, capital outlay, and other expenses (10: [QEP Budget, 2017-21](#))

Assessment of the Plan (Recommendation 9)

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee stated that the University's plans to assess the achievement of the defined goals/outcomes of the QEP were not well developed. In response to the recommendations of the Committee, the University has completely revised the assessment process for the QEP and hired a University Assessment Coordinator (UAC, a new position) to coordinate this process. The UAC will be responsible for collecting and scoring the instruments related to the QEP assessment process, analyzing results (with support of the QEP Assessment Team), and producing the QEP Annual Report.

In 2017, the University adopted a new Institutional Effectiveness Model that serves as a unifying framework for University assessment processes, including the QEP. Responsibilities for assessment in the QEP are defined for programs/departments and the institution. The evaluation framework for the QEP includes three instruments delivered at the program/departmental or institutional level, two that specifically address the student learning outcomes (SLOs) and one that provides an opportunity for faculty, staff, and administrative feedback. These instruments, and the SLOs they address, are common institutional assessment measures utilized by all programs upon implementation of the QEP.

Program and Departmental Assessment Responsibilities. Programs and departments are responsible for assessing the QEP SLOs at the course and program level for all students participating in capstone courses associated with *Learning for Life*. These responsibilities include the administration of an electronic rubric for measuring student attainment of SLO benchmarks (11: [QEP Electronic SLO Rubric 2016-17](#)). This rubric is completed by the student's faculty or site supervisor. The program/department is also responsible for ensuring that each student completes the reflection survey at defined intervals (13: [QEP Student Reflection Surveys 2016-17](#)). The seven programs participating in the QEP Pilot completed this process in spring 2017. The *QEP Annual Report 2017* includes assessment reports for each pilot program. These reports demonstrate that programs have reviewed pilot data and have begun revision of the program assessment process for the 2017-18 cycle (12: [QEP Annual Report 2017](#)). For example, the Department of Music will discuss and implement ways to add a critical reflection post-recital experience to standardize the process of assessing SLO 2, "During the capstone experiential course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop

applications of knowledge based on the reflection.” This revision will serve as a model for other programs implementing the QEP.

Institutional Assessment Responsibilities. The University is responsible for compiling assessment data and identifying actions and revisions based on program assessment reports. Institutional responsibilities for assessment of the QEP include the development and use of a standard form for reporting QEP student learning outcomes, measures, findings, analyses, and recommendations at the program level (15: [QEP Assessment Reporting Form](#)). The University is also responsible for compiling an annual report describing the assessment of the SLOs (12: [QEP Annual Report 2017](#)). This report provides evidence that the University is measuring the achievement of the goals and outcomes articulated in the QEP. As per the University Assessment Process, the report identifies targets, findings, analyses, and recommended actions for institutional improvement of the QEP. For example, faculty in several pilot programs reported uncertainty about the appropriate use of QEP rubrics as they related to their specific disciplines. To address this concern, the University hosted an Experiential Learning Conference as professional development for faculty and staff during “on-call” week at the beginning of the fall 2017 semester. Dr. Stephanie Thomason, president-elect of the board of the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), conducted sessions concerning the Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities, reflection, rubrics, and assessment (18: [Experiential Learning Conference Program 15 August 2017](#)). Faculty representing all departments participated in this conference.

The Committee questioned whether professional development and orientation would be provided to site supervisors. To coordinate professional development and assessment in relation to internship programs, the University is exploring the creation of an Internship Council. The Internship Council will examine best practices for internships and develop standardized guidelines for internship programs across all disciplines. The creation of the Internship Council was a subject of discussion at the 2017 Experiential Learning Conference described above.

As noted by the Committee, some faculty members expressed that assessment was one of their biggest areas of concern. To address this concern, the University has included assessment as one of the four sessions covered during the Experiential Learning Conference in August 2017 (18: [Experiential Learning Conference Program 15 August 2017](#)). All members of the QEP Teams, including the Assessment team, participated in the conference, along with program coordinators and faculty, staff, and administrators. The newly-hired University Assessment Coordinator will also provide guidance to faculty in assessing the QEP and its SLOs.

2017 QEP Pilot Assessment and Findings

The University began the process of assessing the QEP in spring 2017 through the QEP Pilot. The purpose of the QEP Pilot was to begin the process of implementing, aligning, and assessing QEP student learning outcomes in a controlled setting – seven programs with a long history in experiential education.

The QEP Director and Assistant Director have identified several key findings. First, the targets for each SLO may be too low for established QEP programs, or for programs that have been utilizing experiential learning practices for several years. Beginning in 2017-18, the QEP Director and the University Assessment Coordinator (UAC) will provide guidance for developing appropriate targets for established programs. It is too early in the process to consider adjusting targets for all forthcoming QEP program applicants.

A second key finding concerns the need for additional training to standardize the implementation of QEP rubrics and assessment instruments. Faculty representing several Pilot Programs reported uncertainty about the appropriate use of QEP rubrics as related to their specific disciplines. To address this need, the University hosted an Experiential Learning Conference during “on-call” week at the beginning of the fall 2017 semester. Faculty representing all departments participated in professional development concerning the Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities, rubrics, reflection, and assessment. Additional refinement of rubric and instrument language and terminology may be needed to address curricular differences in programs that emphasize research or performance-based projects and experiences. Pilot Program faculty have proposed innovative methods of addressing the QEP SLOs that may serve as models for future implementation. As noted above, the Department of Music will implement a critical reflection post-recital experience to standardize the process of assessing SLO 2.

A third key finding concerns low response rates on QEP survey instruments. To address this finding, the QEP Director and the UAC will utilize survey software that can track student, faculty, and administrator participation. The QEP Director and Implementation Team will also encourage the incorporation of QEP survey instruments as mandatory elements of capstone courses. Data gathered through these methods are shared with University administrators, Pilot Program Coordinators, and Program Coordinators preparing for QEP implementation to promote continuous improvement of the QEP process.

Actions Taken to Revise and Implement the Assessment Plan for the QEP

- Completed the process of developing and populating the QEP Grants Team, Implementation Team, and Assessment Team ([4: QEP Teams 2017-18](#))
- Developed and implemented an electronic rubric to facilitate the assessment of QEP SLOs in the seven pilot programs; data included in 2017 Annual Report ([11: QEP](#))

Electronic SLO Rubric 2016-17; 12: QEP Annual Report 2017)

- Developed and administered reflection surveys to students participating in the seven pilot programs; data included in 2017 Annual Report (*13: QEP Student Reflection Surveys 2016-17; 12: QEP Annual Report 2017*)
- Developed and administered a survey to assess administrative perceptions of the QEP and its implementation; data included in 2017 Annual Report (*14: QEP Faculty and Administrative Survey 2016-17; 12: QEP Annual Report 2017*)
- Developed a standardized form for reporting program assessment outcomes, measures, findings, analyses, and recommendations (*15: QEP Assessment Reporting Form*)
- Compiled 2017 QEP Annual Report, which includes the assessment of the QEP and its SLOs and Service Outcome; the assessment reports for seven pilot programs; and survey data and responses from the Student Reflection Surveys and the Faculty and Administrative Survey (*12: QEP Annual Report 2017*)

Through these revisions, the University demonstrates its commitment to providing sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP and to assessing the achievement of its goals and outcomes.

Analysis and Comments for Strengthening the QEP

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee offered the following ideas for strengthening the QEP. The University addresses each of these below:

- 1. The plan to assess achievement of the student learning outcomes requires a more detailed and precise evaluation framework including articulation of assessment responsibilities both at the departmental and institutional level and identification of at least one common institutional assessment measure.**

As described above, the University adopted a new Institutional Effectiveness Model that serves as a unifying framework for University assessment processes, including the QEP. Responsibilities for assessment in the QEP are defined for programs/departments and the institution. The evaluation framework for the QEP includes three instruments delivered at the program/departmental or institutional level, two of which specifically address SLOs. These instruments, and the SLOs they address, are common institutional assessment measures that will be utilized by all programs upon implementation of the QEP.

Program and Departmental Assessment Responsibilities

Programs and departments are responsible for assessing the QEP SLOs at the course and program level. These responsibilities include the administration of an electronic rubric for measuring student attainment of SLO benchmarks (*11: QEP Electronic SLO Rubric 2016-17*).

This rubric is completed by the student's faculty or site supervisor. The program/department is also responsible for ensuring that each student completes the reflection survey at defined intervals (13: [QEP Student Reflection Surveys 2016-17](#)). The seven programs participating in the QEP Pilot completed this process in spring 2017. The *QEP Annual Report 2016-17* includes assessment reports for each pilot program. These reports demonstrate that programs have reviewed pilot data and have begun revision of the program assessment process for the 201718 cycle (12: [QEP Annual Report 2017](#)). For example, the Department of Music will discuss and implement ways to add a critical reflection post-recital experience to standardize the process of assessing SLO 2, "During the capstone experiential course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection." This revision will serve as a model for other programs implementing the QEP.

Institutional Assessment Responsibilities

The University is responsible for compiling assessment data and identifying actions and revisions based on program assessment reports. Institutional responsibilities for assessment of the QEP include the development and use of a standard form for reporting QEP student learning outcomes, measures, findings, analyses, and recommendations at the program level (15: [QEP Assessment Reporting Form](#)). The University is also responsible for compiling an annual report describing the assessment of the SLOs (12: [QEP Annual Report 2017](#)). This report provides evidence that the University is measuring the achievement of the goals and outcomes articulated in the QEP. As per the University Assessment process, the report identifies targets, findings, analyses, and recommended actions for institutional improvement of the QEP. For example, Pilot Program faculty reported uncertainty about the appropriate use of QEP rubrics as they related to their specific disciplines. To address this concern, the University hosted an Experiential Learning Conference as professional development for faculty and staff during "on-call" week at the beginning of the fall 2017 semester. Dr. Stephanie Thomason, president-elect of the board of the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), conducted sessions concerning the Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities, reflection, rubrics, and assessment (18: [Experiential Learning Conference Program 15 August 2017](#)). Faculty representing all departments participated in this conference.

2. A clearer, more precise, and uniform process of data collection for assessment of the QEP learning outcomes might be investigated.

As described in the response to Comment 1 above, the University has defined a uniform process for data collection at the departmental/program and institutional levels. To ensure uniformity of the process, the QEP program utilizes a standardized electronic rubric (11: [QEP Electronic SLO Rubric 2016-17](#)) and a standardized program assessment reporting form (15: [QEP Assessment Reporting Form](#)). An example from the QEP Pilot is available (16: [LSC QEP Assessment Report 2016-17](#)). In Summer 2017, the University hired a University Assessment Coordinator (UAC), a new position, to coordinate the University's QEP assessment activities.

The UAC will serve as the single point-of-contact for data collection and management, thus ensuring a more precise and uniform process.

- 3. The institution indicated in interviews, as well as in the written plan, that the QEP Director would be a person who is, at the same time, an existing department head, departmental internship coordinator, and faculty member. As the implementation and start-up is a very large administrative task, it remains to be seen if such staffing will be adequate to address the program needs of this plan. The university might evaluate the decision made in the second iteration of the QEP to have the QEP Director as a less-than-full-time administrator.**

The University determined that a full-time director was advantageous for the accomplishment of the goals and outcomes articulated in its QEP. The role and responsibilities for the QEP Director are defined in two sections of the QEP ([1: Learning for Life: Experience Your Future, Section VIII: Organizational Structure and Section IX: Resources](#)). The QEP Director is responsible for administering and coordinating the QEP and its budget; communicating with students, faculty, staff, and University stakeholders; marketing and web development; collaborating with the UAC; coordinating professional development activities; serving on the Institutional Effectiveness Committee; attending Curriculum Review Council meetings; developing student recognition programming; and compiling QEP Impact Report. In spring 2017, the former Director of the School of Creative and Performing Arts, William Brent, assumed the role of Director of the QEP. He agreed to assume the role of Interim-Director, delay retirement, and maintain no teaching or other administrative duties. The University will begin a search for a permanent appointment in the 2017 fall semester. In addition, the University has established a position for Assistant Director of the QEP with faculty status.

- 4. More clarification is needed on a decentralized staffing plan as some participants in the faculty focus group indicated that each department would have a release-time faculty member for program coordination and assessment. One might expect that this would be included in the Budget portion of the plan (p. 36).**

The vast majority of the work associated with implementing the QEP will take place during the curriculum development phase. Faculty Grants, in the form of release time or stipend, are available during this phase. Program faculty will be responsible for experiential learning coursework as part of their teaching responsibilities. Since the assessment of the QEP is part of the broader SLO assessment process, existing program coordinators and department heads will be responsible for program assessment oversight. As such, no additional release time or stipends are needed to implement the QEP.

5. The QEP Committee would likely benefit from reviewing accessibility to experiential learning knowledge for its implementation and ongoing faculty development.

The University established two days of professional development in August 2017 during “on-call” week. On August 14, Dr. Stephanie Thomason, president-elect of the board of the NSEE, addressed a meeting of the University’s faculty and staff with a presentation concerning experiential learning. On August 15, the University hosted an Experiential Learning Conference for faculty and staff directly involved with the QEP ([18: Experiential Learning Conference Program 15 August 2017](#)). Dr. Thomason directed sessions on the Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities, reflection, rubrics, and assessment. Those attending included all members of the Grants Team, Implementation Team, and Assessment Team, as well as coordinators for academic programs implementing the QEP in the near future. Additional workshops and retreats are planned for the beginning of each academic semester to assist faculty and staff in implementing the QEP ([17: QEP Training Calendar 2017-21](#)).

6. A strategic plan for faculty development plan can be a sustainable way for implementing the QEP across the curriculum.

The University maintains a professional development calendar that affords opportunities for improving the expertise of faculty. The QEP Training Calendar identifies opportunities for professional development on experiential learning for the next four years ([17: QEP Training Calendar 2017-21](#)). The 2017 NSEE visit and retreat will provide a foundation for faculty development. Additional workshops and retreats will be included on the professional development calendar associated with the University’s “on-call” week at the beginning of each semester. Program faculty who have completed the process of implementing experiential learning capstone activities will be available for panel discussions to provide guidance to program faculty preparing to begin the process. QEP Team members will be available to answer questions during these panels, as well. The University Assessment Coordinator will be available to share relevant findings from QEP program assessment to facilitate a culture of continuous improvement.

7. Integrating the Principles of Experiential Education throughout the curriculum, beginning with the first-year seminar, could be a consideration to strengthen the QEP by preparing students early on for the experiences in the third and fourth year.

All students will be introduced to the *Learning for Life* QEP as part of the Freshman Connection summer orientation program and University Studies 1000, a required, one-semester-hour, first-year orientation seminar. In an effort to prepare students early on for experiential learning practices, the University developed a promotional video that introduces *Learning for Life: Experience Your Future* (<https://vimeo.com/218690005/027386393d>). The video is utilized at all freshman orientation and recruiting events and includes actual Northwestern students, faculty, and alumni. As part of the curriculum development and QEP implementation process, academic programs will be required to demonstrate that revised curricula provide “a sufficient

foundation for experiential activities and a clear plan for progress and completion” and provide “orientation and training for all participating students, faculty, and organizational partners” (7: [QEP Implementation Rubric](#)).

8. The faculty indicated in interviews with the Committee that they were desirous of curriculum guidance and expertise in experiential education. A well-designed and comprehensive faculty development plan for experiential learning could address this need.

As described above, faculty development will be incorporated into the University’s professional development calendar (17: [QEP Training Calendar 2017-21](#)). The 2017 Experiential Learning Conference will provide a foundation for faculty development. Additional workshops and retreats will be included on the professional development calendar associated with the University’s “on-call” week at the beginning of each semester. Program faculty who have completed the process of implementing experiential learning capstone activities will be available for panel discussions to provide guidance to program faculty preparing to begin the process. QEP Team members will be available to answer questions during these panels, as well. The UAC will be available to share relevant findings from QEP program assessment to facilitate a culture of continuous improvement.

9. The five-year timeline for the QEP course implementation could be revisited for a more streamlined and ambitious rollout of six experiential learning credits for all programs.

The timeline for full implementation of the *Learning for Life* QEP has been redesigned to ensure all academic programs have completed their curricular revisions by spring 2020 for full implementation in fall 2020. A revised schedule for program implementation is included in the attached table (5: [QEP Implementation Timeline with Coordinators 2016-17](#)). The QEP Timeline has been revised to reflect these changes (1: [Learning for Life: Experience Your Future, Section VII: Timeline](#)).

10. Evidence of sustainability of the QEP beyond five years could be designed.

The changes associated with this QEP, being curricular in nature, are likely to remain in place once enacted. To ensure the sustainability of the QEP, program coordinators, in coordination with the UAC, will continue gathering appropriate data related to SLOs and implementing curricular revisions as needed. This will ensure that the University’s programs remain committed to experiential learning beyond the conclusion of the QEP implementation.

11. Expansion of types of experiential education might be revisited to present faculty and students with additional options for learning opportunities.

The initial draft of the *Learning for Life* QEP included three options for experiential learning opportunities: internship, undergraduate research, and performance-based projects and

experiences. The University expanded the QEP to include a study abroad option based on discussions held during the exit interview with the On-Site Visiting Team and consultations with faculty and the QEP Executive Committee. This option is immediately available to all academic programs applying for program redesign in 2017. The University's QEP document has been updated to reflect the expansion of the program and to incorporate research about the value of Study Abroad in experiential education ([1: Learning for Life: Experience Your Future, Section V: Literature Review & Best Practices](#)). The updated implementation process further permits program faculty to adopt experiential learning activities specific to each program concentration, when appropriate and under certain stipulations ([1: Learning for Life: Experience Your Future, Section VI: Actions to be Implemented](#)).

12. Consideration might be given to address the possibility that heavy reliance on internships may result in a glut of students wanting such opportunities in a limited marketplace: Alexandria, Leesville, Natchitoches, and Shreveport.

Students currently completing internships for the University's academic programs—Health and Exercise Science, Hospitality Management and Tourism, and Music, for example—are already doing so throughout the country. As described above, though, the incorporation of a Study Abroad option and changes to the implementation process will facilitate more flexibility for programs redesigning their curricula. By allowing program faculty to tailor experiential learning activities to individual program concentrations, under certain circumstances, the QEP will help programs ensure students have access to appropriate and accessible experiential learning activities.