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Title of Proposed QEP:

Learning from Looking Within

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Overview

The problem this QEP proposal seeks to address is how to increase students' critical thinking skills while producing life-long learners. As students grow through university experiences, challenges, and opportunities, they should be provided with the unique learning experience of reflection. As Gibbs (1988) stated:

It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations which enable new situations to be tackled effectively. (p. 9)

In addition to being an active learning method, reflective learning has been shown to increase development of life-long learners. As cited in Henter & Indreica (2014), reflective journaling can stimulate a student to be consciously aware of their own learning strategies and cognitive decision making. Therefore, a student can improve future learning. Through journaling and thinking about lived situations, a student can make mental connections and perceive meaning in their learning as well as the importance of the subject matter being learned. This can increase student motivation and achievement which increases the outcomes of a student becoming a life-long learner (Henter & Indreica, 2014).

With advancement of technology, we have access to a plethora of knowledge at our fingertips. What could be lost or not developed sufficiently along the way is the skill of critical thinking. Flavell's Metacognitive Theory has been imperative to the learning method of self-reflection which focuses on student engagement in the learning process. Learning performance can be improved by raising students' metacognitive awareness through reflective journaling (Henter & Indreica, 2014). Another factor seen with reflective learning is a greater use of adopting strategies of self-reflection related to attitudes, thought processes, values, and assumptions in an effort to understand complex roles in relation to others (Cunliffe, 2003). In higher education, as we strive to incorporate active learning at all levels, this method of learning is essential to developing critical thinking skills in life-long learners who will be entering the workplace.

Proposed QEP Design

University's Strategic Plan

This proposal is grounded in the university's strategic plan by meeting one of the newest priorities: Academic Excellence. Academic Excellence is described in the W's Strategic Priorities as:

Academics are at the heart of a W education. Our dedicated faculty, respected in their fields, champion a commitment to teaching shaped by their research, scholarship, and creative expressions. Partnered with an equally committed staff, they foster a learning environment that is both broad and highly personalized. For the W, academic excellence

results in graduates who are equipped for the competitive and diverse global economy.

There are many goals of academic excellence that will be obtained through reflective learning, including: providing a comprehensive academic experience, preparing students to be life-long learners and contributing members of today's global economy, and providing resources to foster excellence in teaching.

Focused Tasks to Improve Student Learning or Student Success

The focused task of the QEP proposed is to implement reflective learning campus wide.

Where, When, and How will the Activities Take Place

A reflective learning workshop(s) would be offered to instructors across the campus who would like to increase knowledge in this area and participate in the QEP. These instructors would implement at least one reflective learning activity in a course. Results of student learning through reflective learning would be evaluated yearly.

Offices and Departments Involved in Implementation

I believe this would be overseen best by the Center for Teaching and Learning. This would be a good resource for reflective learning workshop(s). At least one instructor from each college would be beneficial for a wider range of impact.

Scope of Application, Involved Parties, and Their Roles

At least one instructor from each college across the campus would attend reflective learning workshop(s) to enhance knowledge on the application of reflective learning in the classroom. Instructors who volunteer for this role would also be responsible for meeting at least yearly to discuss student learning outcomes associated.

Target Population and Number Expected to Benefit

The target population would be students at the university. There may be a limited number of students at each college impacted, but workshop(s) could be offered more than once and open to more instructors depending on the need of faculty members.

Logistics and Timeline

Year One

- Task a representative from the Center for Teaching and Learning to research a reflective journaling workshop(s) and other beneficial material for the project.
- Form a committee with at least one instructor from each college and at least one representative from the Center for Teaching and Learning.
- Task the committee with attending reflective journaling workshop(s) and designing at least one reflective learning assignment for at least one course per instructor on the committee.

Year Two - Five

- Each committee member should implement the assignment developed for the students in designated course(s).

- Each committee member should be responsible for collecting data associated to the reflective learning assignment in his/her class(es).
- Have collected data distributed to the committee for review and assessment.
- Implement any changes deemed necessary.

Congruency with University Mission and Strategic Plan

This proposal aligns with the university’s mission of “emphasizing a personalized learning experience... providing education opportunities in a diverse and inclusive environment...and enhance student development and achievement as a platform for lifelong education and growth” (Mississippi University for Women [MUW], 2021, para. 7). The proposal also directly relates to the guiding principles of “encourages lifelong learning, strong career preparation, and personal growth”, “awareness of self”, “student oriented”, “offers a student-life program that stimulates learning and leadership development”, and “allows students to grow in their understanding of self and others” (MUW, 2021, para. 8-11). The strategic priority met by this proposal is academic excellence. There are many goals of academic excellent that will be obtained through reflective learning, including: providing a comprehensive academic experience, preparing students to be life-long learners and contributing members of today’s global economy, and providing resources to foster excellence in teaching. These goals will be met by providing a comprehensive academic experience through creating and providing an academic environment that fosters critical thinking and creative expression, personalized learning environment, and creating and instilling in our students an attitude of active engagement and investment in their learning through fostering critical thinking skills.

Current State of the Issue

Institutional Data to Support the Need

According to the 2020-2021 Graduation Survey conducted by the university:

- Rate MUW’s contribution to your desire for life-long learning: 57.25% excellent, 32.25% good, 6.87% fair, 1.55% poor, and 2.07% not applicable
- Rate MUW’s contribution to your critical thinking skills: 58.74% excellent, 33.68% good, 5.27% fair, 0.64% poor, and 1.67% not applicable

According to the 2019 Alumni Survey conducted by the university, the following rankings were received for strongly disagree, disagree, and neutral:

- My experience at the W prepared me for professional employment in my field (15.28%) (5.68% chose N/A)
- My experience at the W enabled me to compete effectively with colleagues educated elsewhere (11.78%) (6.55% chose N/A)
- My experience at the W prepared me for further study in my major field (10%) (6.96% chose N/A)
- While attending the W, I developed the ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in written form (11.3%)

According to the General Education Results Report 2018-2019 as related to Goal #1, Critical Thinking and Effective Communication, results are as follows:

- Goal Met (55)
- Goal Not Met (12)
- Inconclusive (15)

I believe that the QEP proposal could potentially impact the above listed perceptions of students if implemented campus wide. The QEP proposal could also meet the goals of the strategic plan as previously discussed.

External Data to Support the Need

Research conducted by Denton (2017) yielded the following results:

- “agree” was the most common response to the question: “Knowing that I need to write a journal entry encourages me to pay more attention to how I am learning as I go through the course material”.
- Many students dedicated their last journal entry to commenting on how throughout the semester their opinions of the journals had changed revealing the following from entries:
 - “I was skeptical thinking they would be pointless and a waste of time, but now I am glad we had to do them”
 - “really forced me to reflect about statistics and my studying habits”
 - “I’ve started to reflect more about my other courses as well”
 - One student believes he/she is calmer during exams due to reflecting on course has forced self-responsibility for faults and increased prioritization.

Student Learning Outcomes

After implementation of the proposed QEP, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate depth and relevance of critical thinking through reflection
- Examine reflection as a bridge between experience and critical thinking skills
- Demonstrate an understanding of how reflective practice can be used throughout the lifetime for personal, work, and environmental situations

Assessment Plan

Assessment Methods

The student learning outcomes can be measurable by the instructors implementing reflective learning. There could also be a reflective learning question added to the graduation survey.

Quantitative/Assessment Instruments or Questions

Reflective journaling question added to the graduation survey would be a useful assessment instrument.

Link Between Methods and Instruments with Expected Outcomes

The assessment methods and instruments could be formulated/created to measure the student learning outcomes in the class as well as overall in the graduation survey.

Estimated Budget

There should be minimal cost to implement this reflective tool in the established curriculum. There would be nominal fees associated with instructors attending professional development workshop(s).

References

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