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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. 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.

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
    The reflective learning activities would originate in the UN 101 course for incoming freshmen. Reflective learning could then continue yearly until graduation for the students in the form of a survey executed in the learning management system (LMS). This would allow for ease of distribution, data collection, and tracking of student growth.

Offices and Departments Involved in Implementation
    As this would be implemented in UN 101 and administered throughout the student's college experience, I believe this would be overseen best by either the Student Success Center or the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Scope of Application, Involved Parties, and Their Roles
    A reflective journaling tool/assignment would need to be created. This could be created with a small committee of faculty members campus wide. The UN 101 instructors would be directly involved with implementation. After completion of UN 101 and moving forward with the college experience, there would need to be other parties involved to track student progression with a reflective journaling tool administered yearly. I believe that could be done in the form of an online survey connected to the LMS which would be easy to track, but may not have the greatest amount of student participation since it's not tied to a grade/course. Another option would be to have it tied to a grade in one course in each college at each level of college progression after UN 101 (sophomore, junior, and senior). This would not be as easy to obtain data, but linking the assignment to a grade might improve student participation. Another idea would be to combine the two previously listed applications. You could have it linked to a course grade, but administer in the form of an online survey. The surveys could be collected by the course instructors and sent to the person/committee overseeing the reflective journaling.

Target Population and Number Expected to Benefit
    The target population would be all students at the university. The target population for initial implementation would be first-time freshmen students. This is the population that would be followed from enrollment to graduation. The most recent 5-year average of first-time freshmen for university enrollment is 607 students. Fall of 2020 had a total unduplicated headcount of 2,704 students at the university.

Logistics and Timeline

Year One
- Form a committee with one representative from each college, Student Success Center, Center for Teaching and Learning, and any other departments that would be beneficial.
- Task the committee with researching reflective journaling assessment tools, assignments, etc.; formulating one assignment on reflective journaling to be implemented in UN 101 campus wide; begin formulating three additional reflective journaling assignments to be implemented over the next three consecutive years.

Year Two
- Implement the assignment developed for first-time freshmen in UN 101.

- Have collected data distributed to the committee for review and assessment.

Year Three
- Continue collecting data from the assignment developed for first-time freshmen in UN 101.
- Implement the assignment developed for sophomores.
- Have collected data distributed to the committee for review and assessment.

Year Four
- Continue collecting data from the assignment developed for first-time freshmen in UN 101 and sophomores.
- Implement the assignment developed for juniors.
- Have collected data distributed to the committee for review and assessment.

Year Five
- Continue collecting data from the assignment developed for first-time freshmen in UN 101, sophomores, and juniors.
- Implement the assignment developed for seniors.
- Have collected data distributed to the committee for review and assessment.

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 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%)
- While attending the W, I developed the ability to analyze and evaluate contradictory points of view (9.12%) (1.3% chose N/A)
- While attending the W, I developed the ability to think globally (13.53%) (0.87% chose N/A)
- While attending the W, I developed the ability to analyze and interpret data to define and solve problems (9.18%) (0.44% chose N/A)
- While attending the W, I developed an increase awareness of ethical responsibility (9.61%) (0.87 chose N/A)

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.

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Student Learning Outcomes
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After implementation of the proposed QEP, students will be able to:
- Demonstrate depth and relevance of critical thinking through reflection
- Acknowledge 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

<div align="center">**Assessment Plan**</div>

Assessment Methods

   The student learning outcomes can be measurable in a survey created for the students to be taken yearly. This assessment tool could be created or further researched for an already established reliable tool.

Quantitative/Assessment Instruments or Questions

   Reflective journaling questions and survey tools would need to be created or further research can be done for an already established tool.

Link Between Methods and Instruments with Expected Outcomes

   The assessment methods and instruments could be formulated/created to measure the student learning outcomes.

<div align="center">**Estimated Budget**</div>

   There should be no additional cost to implement this reflective tool in the established curriculum. For surveys, the university already uses Qualtrics so that would be utilized for survey assessment. At most, the instructors implementing reflective journaling could attend professional development activities if needed. I believe there is enough research on reflective learning online to provided needed information for faculty, though.

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