

CBU Community Convocation

08.19.10

“The QEP and the CBU Community”

The centerpiece of our SACS on-site visit at the end of March (28-30) is our Quality Enhancement Plan, or QEP. When the SACS team arrives, they will spend approximately one day reviewing our Compliance Report, and nearly two days evaluating our QEP.

I'd first like to *recognize our QEP Leadership Team*, who's been working alongside me all summer long: AY, AMW, EW, KW, AM, AK. Without the hard work and faithful commitment of these wonderful colleagues – not only in ensuring that we develop a quality, successful QEP but, above all, to seeing our students succeed – we would *not* be *where we are* in the process.

Our accrediting agency – the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or SACS – makes it clear that we *need not* select a topic that is a *problem area*, or one that is in desperate need of fixing; rather, it can be an area that we, as a community, deem essential to the promise and promotion of **student learning**.

The process of **developing our QEP** started in earnest nearly 1 ½ years ago, with the **selection of our topic**: a series of campus-wide conversations and focus groups led to a topic proposal, and resulted in a unanimous vote by the Faculty Assembly last February that we focus on **improving academic advising**.

- Richard Light, author of *Making the Most of College*, wrote that: “Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience.” And although *retention* is not one of the stated goals of our QEP, Vincent Tinto, a sort of advising “guru,” argues that: “Effective retention programs have come to understand that academic advising is at the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students.”
- We're not talking about a complete overhaul of the advising “system” here at CBU – since there are a lot of things that we do *quite well* – so much as taking a careful, honest, critical look at the *philosophy of advising* that's been operative to this point, and determining whether a different model or approach to advising might better enhance the *learning culture* and, thus, **improve student learning**. As I've stated, repeatedly: ***We're doing this for our students, not for SACS.***
- The “**shift**” in **philosophy** – not simply here at CBU, but at the overwhelming majority of institutions CBU most closely resembles – is away from a more “prescriptive” approach that views advising primarily in terms of *course selection and registration*, and toward one that is more “**teaching-centered**,” with a premium placed on ***shared responsibility for student learning and success***.
- With our institutional **vision** and **mission statements** in hand and in mind, the Leadership Team developed both a ***definition of advising*** at CBU and a ***mission statement for our advising program***:

- **Definition:** “Academic advising is an intentional process through which a qualified representative of CBU assists students in achieving meaningful academic, vocational, and personal goals within a culture of shared responsibility.”
- **Mission Statement:** “Academic advising at CBU is a teaching and learning process dedicated to student success. It engages students in creating dynamic plans to realize their personal, educational, and career goals and in developing commitments to lifelong learning and service to society.”
- These documents were forwarded to the President, Vice Presidents, Deans, Department Chairs, and Program Directors for feedback and, ultimately, approval.
- And although these documents are *dynamic* in nature – in that they’ll be subject to ongoing review, evaluation, and revision – we allowed them to guide, drive, and inform the development of *four student learning outcomes*, each of which are supported by specific “action items,” all of which are extremely *practical* and *measurable*:
 - **Students will *craft educational plans* based on assessment of abilities, goals, interests, and values**
 - **Students will *implement educational plans* tailored to attain their educational and professional goals**
 - **Students will *assume responsibility for meeting academic program requirements***
 - **Students will *develop a sense of social responsibility***
- With the able assistance of a number of faculty and staff members – including the entire Library staff – we conducted a detailed **review of the literature and “best practices”** associated with academic advising and successful advising programs, the results of which were instrumental in identifying the specific “**actions** to be taken and activities to be implemented on [our] campus to bring about the desired enhancement of student learning,” and we also developed a reasonable **time line** for implementing each of the **action items**. Here are some examples:
 - **Develop a systematic advisor training program**
 - **Develop an advising syllabus and advisor handbook**
 - **Incorporate a strong academic element into ORIN 100**
 - **Develop several Moodle courses in academic advising**
 - **Create a centralized advising center** (which is actually included in the most recent iteration of our *Strategic Plan* – p. 15, “action step” #3)
 - **Incorporate advising into our first living/learning community**

- and, with the involvement and assistance of *all faculty advisors* and the *Faculty Assembly Policy Committee*, develop a plan to **move advising from “service” to “teaching”** in the *Faculty Handbook* (at a point to be determined in the five-year implementation period)
- Having just completed the “**organizational structure**” portion of our Plan – wherein we identify which positions and/or offices will oversee the actual implementation and assessment of each of the action items – we’re now in the process of estimating and locating “the financial, physical, and human **resources** necessary for developing, implementing, and sustaining” our Plan.
- Finally, we’ll need to evaluate the overall **goals of our QEP** and develop the **means for assessing the success of our Plan**. We’ll obviously need to employ *multiple assessment strategies*, using both quantitative and qualitative, as well as internal and external measures. Above all, we’ll need to “develop a system for *monitoring progress in implementing [our] QEP* and to *describe the process by which the results of evaluation will be used to improve student learning.*”
- One final “item” that’s *absolutely essential* to a successful QEP is the development and implementation of a **marketing plan**. If any of you have *any ideas* and would like to be involved in this effort, *please* speak with me as soon as possible, so we can begin to “get the word out” to everyone associated with CBU: *especially our students*. **Keep in mind:**
 - SACS is at liberty to speak with anyone on campus about our QEP, and the *last* thing we want is for a SACS representative to get that same kind of “deer-in-the-headlights” look from a student that we, as educators, all too often get from *our* students when we pose perfectly reasonable questions about things like, oh, *assigned reading*.
- **In conclusion:** I’d like to thank each and every one of you for your *support* and *trust* throughout this rather *intense* and *very important* process. If there’s one thing that’s become abundantly clear to me since assuming this position as QEP chair a few years ago, it’s how *committed* we are, *as a community*, to seeing our students succeed – on myriad levels, both in- and outside of the classroom – and just how important *good, effective advising* is to *student success*.
- Two professors at Penn State suggested, recently, that *academic advising* is “perhaps the only structured campus endeavor that can guarantee [student] interaction with a caring and concerned adult who can help them shape a meaningful learning experience for themselves.”
- A few years earlier, Gregory of Naziansus – Cappadocian Father and 4th-century Archbishop of Constantinople – proposed that, “The scope of our art [as educators] is to give wings to the soul.” And even though this is certainly not the whole of academic advising, wouldn’t it be wonderful if, in the process of forging relationships with our students, the soul of even one young woman or man was elevated to an entirely new level? As Lasallian educators, could we possibly aspire to anything higher? *Thank you very much . . .*