

QEP Topic Proposal  
Faculty Assembly Meeting  
February 11, 2010

Guiding questions for conversations with CBU constituencies and focus groups: *How can we best serve our students and improve student learning?*

Although all three of the possible topics we considered for our QEP – a First Year Experience program, incorporating a Service Learning component into the curriculum, and improving Academic Advising – would certainly be beneficial to our students and help to enhance the learning culture here at CBU, the cumulative result or “fruit” of an extensive series of on-campus conversations and focus groups points clearly to the need to focus our attention, efforts, and resources on improving *Academic Advising*.

As you might imagine, strong arguments were made both for and against each and all of the three “candidates.” However, after devoting countless hours to reviewing the results of these conversations, listening again – *and again* – to recordings of the three focus groups that included and involved faculty, staff, student, and alumni representatives, and in careful consultation with members of the SACS Leadership Team as well as various faculty and staff members – who were kind and generous enough to review not only the summaries of the focus groups but also some of the empirical data – the consensus was that, at this point in the life of our institution, we need to take a careful, critical look at our current “system” of advising students.

Essential to the successful development of our QEP will be, among other things, articulating clear, achievable goals and outcomes, and also identifying the appropriate means by which to measure or assess the extent to which improvement of the overall advising system has, in fact, impacted and enhanced student learning.

Over the course of the three focus groups conducted in late November and early December, strong arguments and rationales were proffered for both First Year Experience and Service Learning, but some rather serious concerns were also raised and voiced; many – or most – of which were tied to the well-intentioned but ill-fated “debacle” that was IDS. And although I’ve never been a proponent of taking the path of least resistance, I *do* believe in the virtuous character of *prudence* – not to mention *common sense* – and know that, when it comes to this critical component of our re-affirmation of accreditation, *we cannot afford to fail*. (I considered invoking Santayana at this point for effect, but thought that might be a bit dramatic . . .)

On the more practical – and perhaps more persuasive – side of things, I’d like to highlight just a few of the more compelling reasons for selecting Academic Advising as our QEP topic, *all* of which emerged directly from my consultation with CBU constituencies over the past year:

- There is currently no formal “system” of advising in place: advisors receive no proper training in advising students, advisors have no formal handbook with which to guide them, and, as a consequence, many students – as well as faculty, staff, and alumni – pointed to the apparent “inconsistency” or “un-evenness” in type and quality of academic advising across the various schools and departments;

- Caring about and being attentive to the individual needs of our students is clearly tied to our Lasallian mission;
- This focus would impact *all* CBU students: day and evening, commuters and residents;
- Academic Advising has the greatest potential for enlisting the kind of broad-based support and involvement of institutional constituencies in the development, implementation, and completion of the Plan that SACS requires;
- The institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the Plan is greatest – *and most realistic* – with respect to Academic Advising;
- Our prospects for identifying specific goals and a plan to assess their achievement appear best in relation to Academic Advising.

Of course, the rationale I've developed is more elaborate and includes much more in terms of details and specifics, but I trust that, at least for purposes of selecting a topic and moving forward with the developmental phase, this brief presentation has proven to be sufficiently convincing as to receive approval from the Faculty Assembly. Thank you!