

TO: CBU Faculty and Staff
FROM: Scott D. Geis, QEP Chair
SUBJECT: QEP Topic Selection (Re-visited)
DATE: March 16, 2009

Good afternoon, friends!

I trust that all is well with you and yours, that your break has been relatively relaxing and enjoyable, and that you are returning refreshed for the second half of the current academic term. In preparation for my duties as QEP chair, CBU has made it possible for me to attend several SACS-sponsored conferences. Although some of the sessions I have attended have proven to be more interesting and useful than others, I am happy to report that I never came away from any session not having learned anything. One of the most important insights – or truths, if you will – that has stuck with me was gleaned from one of the plenary sessions at the 2007 SACS Annual Meeting in New Orleans. The keynote speaker was Dr. Ben Carson, director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University, perhaps known best for his pioneering work in separating conjoined twins. At one point in his presentation that was both challenging and inspiring, Carson defined *success* as “using your God-given talents and abilities to elevate other people.” I have thought about that a lot as of late, especially in relation to our privileges and responsibilities as educators. For, as St. John Baptist de La Salle once wrote, “To touch the hearts of [our] pupils and to inspire them with the Christian spirit is the greatest miracle [we] can perform, and one which God expects of [us].”

Over the course of the past few months, I have had several people ask if I have come up with a QEP topic yet, to which I have consistently – and respectfully – responded: “That’s not *my* responsibility; it’s *our* responsibility as a university.” Indeed, my primary responsibility, as QEP chair, is to *bring people together and listen to them*. In the coming days and weeks, I will attempt to bring together individuals from as many constituencies as possible – including faculty members from the various schools, disciplines, and departments, staff members, representatives and members of various student organizations, administrators, alumni, and board of trustees members – and listen to their ideas about how we might better serve our students. Before I provide you with some ideas for possible QEP topics – not to influence the outcome, but simply to help us all to begin to think creatively and concretely about this particular piece of the overall reaffirmation of accreditation process – I would like to provide you with a more formal context for the QEP, as well as the actual criteria by which SACS will ultimately evaluate our QEP proposal.

Part III of the *Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*, which deals specifically with the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), begins with the following statement:

The Principles of Accreditation attests to the commitment of the Commission on Colleges to the enhancement of the quality of higher education and to the proposition that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a component of the accreditation process that reflects and affirms both of these commitments. Developing a QEP as a part of the reaffirmation process is an opportunity and an impetus for the institution to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue or issues the institution considers important to improving student learning.

And, whereas the Compliance Certification component of the reaffirmation process focuses primarily on the past and the present, the QEP is “forward-looking” and will be an “ongoing activity,” the implementation of which begins with our 2011 SACS visit; the QEP is thus not to be viewed as an “episodic event.” Therefore, in order for us to succeed in this endeavor, our Plan must be aligned and in accordance with Core Requirement 2.12 of the aforementioned *Handbook*, which reads as follows:

The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and

accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.

With this in mind, the fundamental question SACS will be asking is: “Has [Christian Brothers University] provided a comprehensive and clear analysis of the critical importance of the QEP for improving the learning environment?”

Lest I overwhelm you (unnecessarily) with too much information in a single correspondence – if you are not overwhelmed already! – allow me to conclude with a brief statement from SACS regarding possible QEP topics, followed by a summary list of topics selected by various institutions over the past 4-5 years. First, the statement from SACS:

Examples of topics or issues include, but are not limited to, enhancing the academic climate for student learning, strengthening the general studies curriculum, developing creative approaches to experiential learning, enhancing critical thinking skills, introducing innovative teaching and learning strategies, increasing student engagement in learning, and exploring imaginative ways to use technology in the curriculum. In all cases, the goals and evaluation strategies must be clearly and directly linked to improving the quality of student learning.

Second, a sampling of topics generated by various institutions and approved by SACS for implementation:

- *Enhancing Intellectual Engagement through the Four-Year Experience*
- *Blueprint to Excellence: Enhancing Academic Support Services – the Campus Culture*
- *Enhancing Student Retention and Services: First-Year Semester, Advising, and Student Life*
- *The Formation of an Academic Resource Center (ARC)*
- *Going Beyond: New Ventures in Field Experience and Collaborative Learning*
- *Student Academic “WEL-ness”: Writing, Engagement, Learning*
- *Enhancement of On-line Education*
- *Improvement of Student Performance through the Enhancement of Faculty/Staff Development*
- *Student Involvement: A Key to Learning*
- *LEAD: Leaders Educated to Make a Difference*
- *Fulfilling the Flagship Agenda: Enhancing Students’ Academic Experiences through Scholarly and Creative Activity*
- *The Integrated Experience: The Merger of the Liberal Arts and Professional Education*
- *Write Now! (The Improvement of College Level Writing)*
- *Partnership in Achieving Student Success (Academic Advising and College Success Skills Course)*
- *Students First: Improving Oral Communication through Technology*
- *Honor and Respect Education – The Moral and Ethical Development of Students*
- *Building a Community of Developing Learners among Students, Faculty and Staff*
- *Learning Enhanced by Non-Classroom Service: A Program of Service and Learning in the Field*
- *Writing Across the Curriculum: Enhancing Student Writing Skills*
- *Service Learning: A Combination of Community Service and Classroom Instruction with a Focus on Critical Reflective Thinking as well as Personal and Civic Responsibility*
- *The Enhancement of Student Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum*
- *Value for Living and Earning a Living: Respect, Responsibility, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration*
- *Developing an Ecological Perspective and Fostering Community Involvement*
- *Strengthening the Global Competence and Research Experiences for Undergraduate Students*
- *Enhancing Student Learning through Improved Advising*
- *The Engaged University: Learning Together to Promote Collaborative, Interdisciplinary Opportunities that Nurture Moral Development and Enhance the Climate of Student Engagement*
- *Education for Citizenship and Leadership in Local and Global Communities*

- *Strengthening Student Learning through a New Freshman Success Experience*
- *A New Enhanced, Comprehensive Student Orientation Program and Allied Support Services: A Foundation for Student Learning Success*
- *Enhancing Student Learning by Developing Faculty Instructional Competencies*
- *Do the Right Thing: A Campus Conversation on Ethics*
- *Degrees of Excellence – Reconceptualizing the Core Curriculum*
- *Increasing Engagement in the Learning Process Among First-Time, First Year Students for the Purpose of Improving Academic Progress*
- *Freshman Learning Communities: Engaging the New Student*
- *Increasing Student Engagement in High Risk Core Curriculum Courses through Enhanced Academic Support and Continued Assessment*
- *The Keystone Project: Improving and Enhancing Student Learning by Strengthening the Fundamental Skills for Academic Excellence*
- *Enriching the First-Year Experience by Building Communities of Learning*
- *The “Write” Stuff: Learner-Centered Instruction as a Plan to Enhance Student Writing Skills*
- *Improving Long-Term Student Outcomes of the Academically Disadvantaged*
- *Enhancing Student Learning through Revising the Curriculum Component of Written and Spoken Communication as a Model for an Evolving Process of Curricular Revision*
- *Identifying the Barriers and Selecting Resources to Enhance the Academic Success of Students in General Education Core Math 101 and ENG 101 Classes*
- *Ensuring Math Success*

Given the clear emphasis SACS places on an institution’s QEP being tied to and an extension of its mission statement and strategic plan, I would encourage each and all of us to re-visit and re-familiarize ourselves with these essential documents prior to our initial conversations. Please accept my heartfelt thanks for your time and attention, and for your commitment to our students. I look forward to meeting with you and hearing your ideas in the coming days and weeks, and encourage you to contact me if you have any questions and/or concerns.

Peace,

Scott

Scott D. Geis, Ph.D.
 Associate Professor of Religious Studies
 Department of Religion & Philosophy
 Christian Brothers University
 Memphis, Tennessee 38102
 901.321.3349
sgeis@cbu.edu