**FAQs**

1. **What is a QEP?**

The QEP, or Quality Enhancement Plan, is a core requirement for SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) accreditation. It is the process whereby all constituencies of Coastal Carolina University come together to create a new university-wide initiative to enhance student learning. For the first time in the history of Coastal Carolina University, the entire Coastal Carolina University community will define the direction of the university by creating a new educational initiative that will become a major part of the distinctiveness of the institution.

2. **What is Coastal’s QEP topic and when will it begin?**

Following a campus-wide proposal and review process, a QEP topic was selected in the spring of 2011 that focused on expanding and enhancing experiential learning for Coastal students. The QEP will officially begin at the start of the Fall 2012 semester, but much training and preparation will occur during the 2011-2012 school year. SACS mandates that the QEP will be a five year commitment, with final assessments in 2017, but the university administration is looking at this as a ten year effort.

3. **What kind of activities will count as experiential learning (EL) activities for Coastal’s QEP?**

This was a common question from the beginning, and the plan that has emerged is both inclusive and flexible. Through an application process, faculty will propose courses for EL-designation. In doing so, they can also apply for resources to assist with the development and/or implementation of the activity. Students who participate in designated EL courses will also be eligible for competitive awards for travel and other expenses associated with the activities. EL activities must meet certain requirements, including a proposed minimum of 15 “experiential contact hours” (actual time doing the experience) and participation in some standardized assessments related to the QEP goals and Student Learning Outcomes. Thus, an EL course can be entirely experiential, or it can qualify simply by having a major component that is experiential and meets QEP guidelines. Two types of existing courses will automatically be placed under the EL-designation umbrella: undergraduate research/scholarship courses and internship courses. Beyond those, EL courses will be identified through the application process and can include such additional activities as international experiences, service learning and designed projects of various types. Examples include Model UN, Mock Trial, mentoring activities tied to course learning outcomes, collaborative projects with international groups, extended field experiences or multi-week thematic science labs, work with local organizations or individuals to plan/develop-market/perform/run specific programs/events/services, and many others.

EL obviously occurs at various levels in any course, but it is not practical to assess every hands-on classroom activity or 3-hour lab for the QEP. Perhaps more importantly, such activities would not be recognized by students as having a level of EL that is worthy of distinction from what is viewed as “normal.” Some activities, such as internships or research, may have hundreds of experiential contact hours and obviously qualify. We have suggested 15 hours of actual hands-on experience in the activity as the minimum for EL-designated courses. This is based on examples of designed projects and course-embedded experiential learning activities that have clearly been effective (for example, multi-day mock trial experiences, a one-hour weekly mentoring activity that continues...
4. Will experiential learning be a new core requirement that all students must do?

No. Faculty and departments are in charge of the curriculum. The QEP should support their priorities, not dictate them. Nonetheless, the QEP is supposed to be transformative for the university, and if it is truly successful, it may well lead to faculty-driven efforts to add EL requirements at the departmental and/or university levels.

5. Are we just adding more hoops for students to jump through and more boxes for them to check off?

We certainly hope not! We view the QEP as an opportunity and a benefit, not a burden, and we hope our colleagues and students share that view. The strong support from faculty, staff, and students that led to the selection of this topic would seem to indicate that most do. SACS specifies that the QEP must be a campus-wide initiative, which is generally interpreted as broad participation, not 100% participation. Not every student has to participate, nor does every faculty member or department. However, most departments and students have expressed a clear desire to either add more EL to their programs or to improve the quality and stature of the EL activities they already offer. This QEP will support efforts to increase the quantity, quality, and visibility of EL activities campus-wide. It also brings additional resources for the faculty and staff who design and run the activities, and to the students who participate. Ultimately, we hope students will look upon Experiential Learning as central to their identity as a CCU student and one of the most valuable components of their college experience.

6. As faculty/staff, how much work will this require on my part?

The QEP is a major, five-year, campus-wide initiative mandated by SACS, so some amount of effort is inevitable for many faculty and staff across the university, particularly if they are involved in EL. It is for exactly that reason that the SACS committee put forth extensive efforts last year to choose a topic with broad support from the campus community. Hopefully, faculty and staff participation in the QEP will complement faculty/staff priorities and goals rather than compete with them. Faculty/staff who do not have, and do not wish to have, anything to do with EL may have little or no additional duties due to the QEP.

As a campus-wide initiative, EL-designated courses and activities under the QEP will need to meet certain minimum requirements and utilize shared assessment tools. Therefore, faculty who submit a proposal for an EL-designated course or activity will be required to attend an introductory workshop to review EL best practices and QEP-related components. Some standardized assessments will be required for any EL activity, and standardized assessment tools will be provided. The QEP will put in place procedures and administrative assistance to assume as much of the assessment work load as possible. Existing internship and undergraduate research/scholarship courses are clearly EL, and they are the only courses that will be required to become EL-designated. Other EL courses and activities will be voluntary applicants, though we expect the available financial resources and shared programmatic goals will result in a large number of these.
7. What benefits will faculty, staff, and students receive from participation in the QEP?

The ultimate benefit of the QEP will be improved learning by students and improved content delivery by faculty and staff. Career and graduate school placement should also improve for graduating students. A number of more tangible benefits are also associated with EL-designated courses and activities, as described below.

For faculty and staff:
- Financial support is available for the development and/or implementation of EL-designated courses and activities. These may include funding for associated equipment, supplies, software, travel, consulting, etc., as well as personnel funding such as summer stipends or faculty release time. Funding requests will be competitive and will be part of the EL proposal process.
- As a major, university-wide initiative, participation in QEP activities will be favorably reviewed by supervisors in annual evaluations for all faculty and staff. For faculty, participation in EL activities is a valued endeavor that blurs the lines between teaching, scholarship, and in many cases, service.

For students:
- Competitive awards will be available for travel and other financial support related to participation in EL activities and for presentations/performances at conferences and other venues.

8. Will there be professional development opportunities?

Yes, and they are absolutely essential. To be successful, our EL courses and activities must be based on best practices. Thus, an introductory training workshop will be required for all faculty who submit an EL designation proposal. These workshops will be offered throughout the duration of the QEP. In order to establish a strong core of EL expertise on campus, additional training levels will be offered after the first year for interested faculty and staff.

9. Will I be forced to give up control of my EL course/activity to some central body?

No! In fact, centralized control of EL activities would be considered a major failure if it occurred. Faculty decide the topic, content, and general design of any EL activity that they propose for their area. Though some basic requirements and assessments will be required, they are standard components for experiential learning, and there is no limit on any additional requirements or student learning outcomes that you may wish to include. Central coordination of the QEP will be necessary, but rather than manage each activity, it will support the efforts of faculty and staff through the promotion of EL activities to prospective student participants, the marketing of EL successes to the university and extended community, and the tracking of some basic assessments.

10. Does the addition of a major experiential learning program mean the university is moving from a liberal arts focus to a vocational training focus?

Not at all. The purpose of the QEP is dictated by SACS, and that purpose is quite simply to enhance student learning campus-wide. The success of the QEP will be judged by the demonstrated achievement of student learning outcomes. Thus, EL is viewed as a powerful tool to enhance
student learning related to already established academic goals and student learning outcomes within departments and the university. Of course, a beneficial side-effect is that increased EL offerings should also improve the post-graduate placement of students. We will track those trends as well, but the primary measurement of success for the QEP will be improved student learning.

11. Who will oversee the QEP?

The co-directors of the QEP are Michael Ruse and John Lox. Several existing positions on campus will play integral roles, including those associated with internships, undergraduate research, international programs, and service learning. Though the exact structure has not been determined, a steering committee, composed of faculty, staff, and students, will also assist in the coordination and oversight of various aspects of the program.

12. If the QEP doesn’t start until fall 2012, what has to be done this year?

A lot! A 100 page draft QEP proposal will be completed by the design team in early September and the final version must be submitted in early January. During the fall semester, we will review the draft implementation and assessment plans with faculty and students and make revisions based on their feedback. Also in the fall, faculty and departments will begin discussions and planning regarding potential EL courses and initiatives that they would like to propose. We must begin the QEP in fall 2012 with a list of EL-designated courses, so in the spring of 2012, we will conduct faculty training (beginning in early January) and will have the first round of proposal submissions for EL-designated courses and supporting resources (mid-spring semester). These will be reviewed by a steering committee of faculty, staff, and students.

13. How can I submit my feedback or get involved in the planning process?

Select the following link: The Coastal Experience